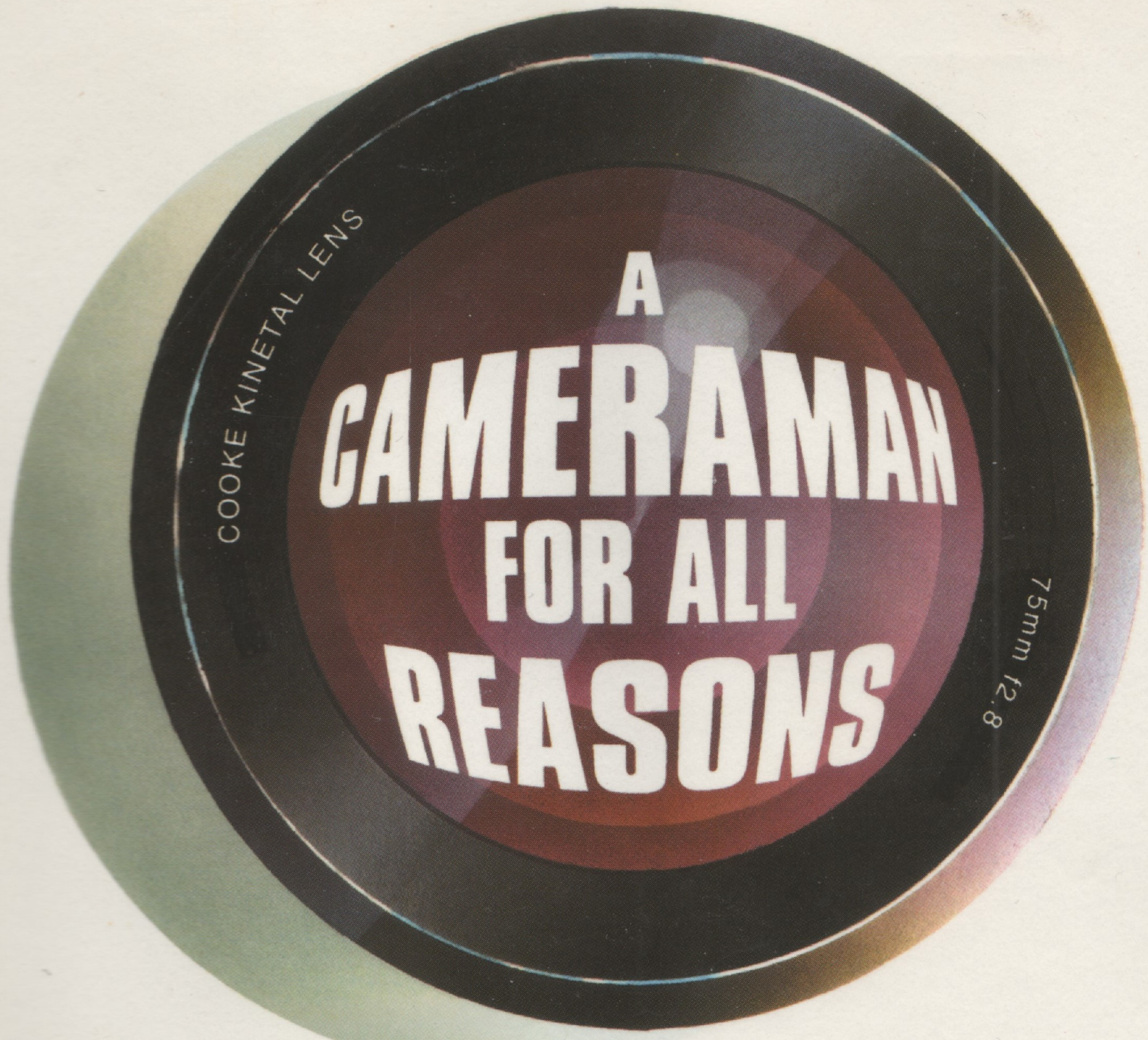
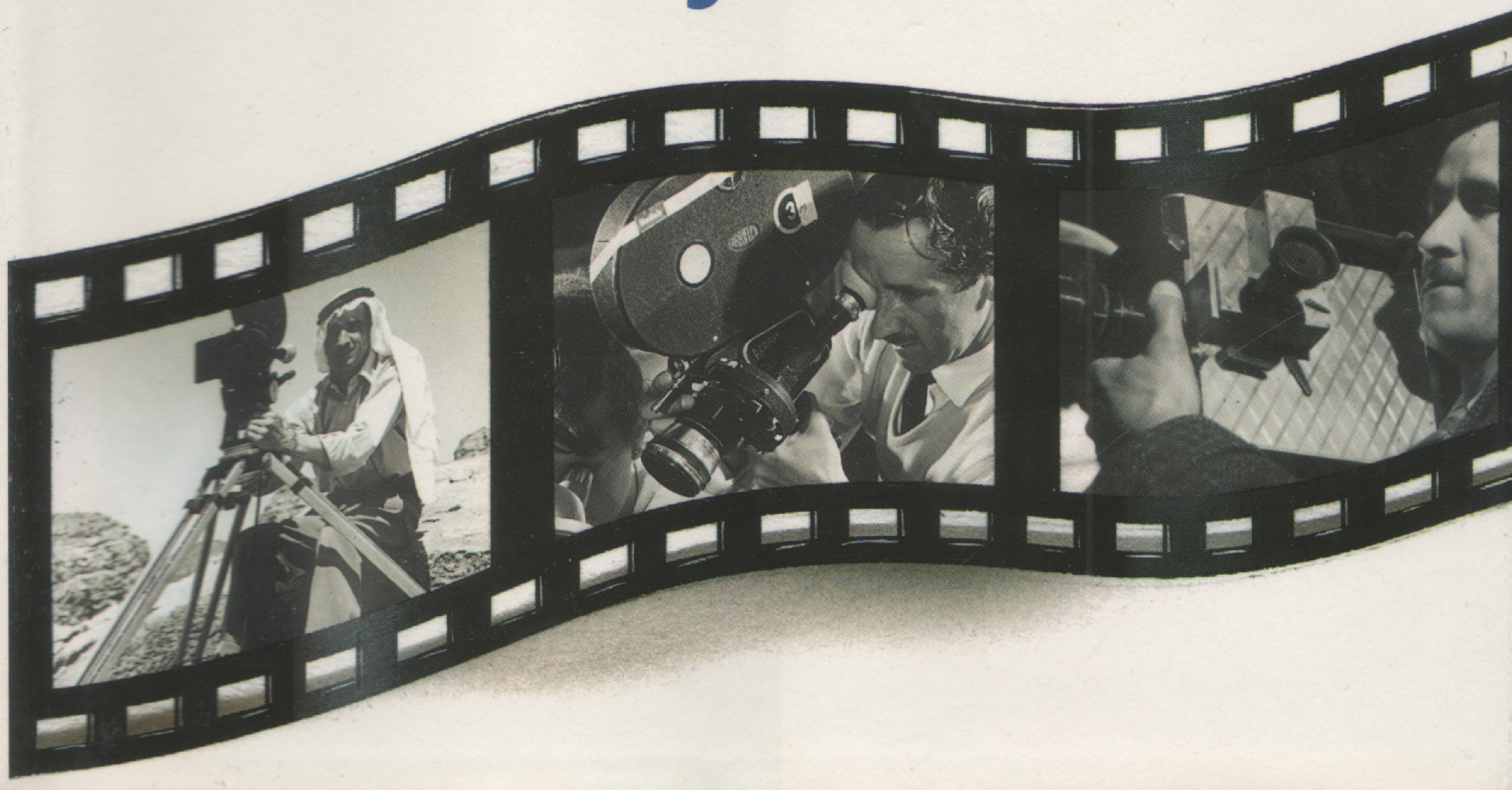


A CAMERAMAN FOR ALL REASONS

BILLY JORDAN



BG

An inauspicious start as a landscape gardener was all the incentive Billy Jordan needed to embark on an altogether more exciting career and his big break, as an assistant cameraman at Pinewood Studios, saw him working alongside Alfred Hitchcock within months. His early film-making career was interrupted, however, by the outbreak of war, and soon Billy found himself travelling all over the world shooting wartime action footage for news coverage and military archives. In his autobiography, the thrills and action of his varied career take us on a rollercoaster from the horror of war to the frivolity of feature film-making, with a rich sprinkling of humour and anecdotage in between. Time at the front is followed by a spell as a newsreel cameraman, covering everything from coronations to cup finals, with disasters thrown in for good measure, and the pinnacle of Jordan's career – 25 years as a freelance cameraman – takes us once more around the world for a fascinating and humorous insight into the realm of film-making in foreign lands.

Often moving and always entertaining, this is a must for film enthusiasts and nostalgia buffs alike.

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A CAMERAMAN FOR ALL REASONS

Billy Jordan

The Book Guild Ltd
Sussex, England

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1

HOW IT ALL STARTED

My school days were not happy ones. Not being a brilliant scholar, my spelling and maths left a lot to be desired. I know two and four make six but after that I'm lost. As for spelling, any word beyond four letters had me beat. Having left school at 14, as was the norm in those days, my father decided to send me to another school for further education – not a wise move, I'm afraid. It did little to improve my education. In fact, it just made me more frustrated to find out what I was good at.

My eldest sister had a boyfriend who was a carpenter in the building trade. Seeing the relationship was a strong candidate for future marriage, and being the kind understanding father he was, my father decided to set us both up in some sort of venture to help us on our way.

How landscape gardening came into it I don't know, but with cash in hand and a third party – a quantity surveyor working for a large building contractor – it made a strange threesome to start up a landscape gardening business. We set claim to a patch of land at the top of Neasden Lane in Willesden, North London, now occupied, as fate would have it, by Samelsons Film Lighting Company.

We had our successes, a notable one being a Spanish garden we built in Edgware for the director of a large cosmetic company. Built on a slight slope, it had a line of arches going down to a large patio with a fish pond. I would lay claim to the design. Well, most of it. As for the manual work, I left that to my sister's boyfriend. He was much stronger than me. I've often wondered if it is still standing. Who knows; I have no intention of finding out. It may be just a pile of stones. If so, they might ask for their money back.

Talking of money, that's what 'Cardell Garden Centre' went short of. Where it went to, or why, I do not know, being the very much junior partner, a creative one, and not even having the pleasure of signing cheques. So the company went bust. I learnt my first big lesson in life. Keep your eyes on the money.

As for my sister's boyfriend, they never did make it to the altar. She

went and married a tailor. Mind you, I had some very nice suits out of the union, and at a reasonable price, I might add. As for me, it was back to the drawing board to find out where my true destiny lay and what my dear old dad could come up with.

In desperation he decided to put me in his bookmaker's office. Horse racing was another of my 'don't know' subjects. Add my inability to spell and I was sure set for another major disaster.

Now my taking down of bets over the phone went something like this:

> 'That's five pound each way Major Projects. How do you spell "Major" and "Projects"? Where is the race? Wolverhampton. How do you spell that?'

By this time my father had lost his cool, taking the phone from me with a few words in my ear.

'By the time you get that bet down the race will be over.'

It took my father just two weeks before he could stand no more. With my elder brother also in the office, he was afraid my inability to spell might be catching.

Now, not only did my father take bets over the phone, but he also had so-called runners collecting them from various sources and phoning them through. One such man was a chippy – a carpenter working on the film sets at Pinewood Studios. In less than no time, through devious means (I believe a certain person's palm was crossed with silver or a few crumpled notes) I was on my way to my first job in the film industry as odd job boy in the camera department. Well, it was a start.

Pinewood in those days consisted of five stages with a central area with two darkrooms for loading camera magazines and processing camera tests and the main camera department servicing the five stages with film and camera equipment. My job was very basic, just an errand-boy taking this and that to the various production stages. All the crews working on various films were freelance, so I was only one of two permanent staff in the camera department.

One got the odd request for a box of sprocket holes from the stores (they're the holes that run down each side of the film) or some other flippant request, but it was always an experience to go onto the studio floor whilst a production was in progress.

After a short while I was given the job as central loader, loading the thousand foot magazines for two or more productions, collecting them from the studio floor, canning up the exposed film ready for despatch to the laboratory for processing.

It was on a production called 'The Last Curtain' with Greta Gynt – they were using a French camera which had two thousand foot magazines one on each side of the camera, one for the unexposed, the other for the exposed film – I was leaving the stage with both, one with the exposed day's filming, the other ready to reload for the next day's work. I tripped and both magazines fell to the ground, being made of Bakelite the heavy one with the exposed film shattered and there, looking up at me exposed to the daylight, was a thousand feet of film – a very expensive day's work. In a flash I took off my coat – wrapped the film in it and took it to the darkroom. Having canned up the film, all I could do was hope for the best, and wait for the day's lab report. I did not want to go back to the set and tell the director of my mishap.

I spent a very sleepless night and couldn't get back to the studio soon enough the next morning to see the lab report. What a relief – slight edge fogging but not in the picture area, only on the last ten feet, so only the last take of the day was NG.

It was good training. Not only did I have the opportunity to be among all the equipment, but I also helped in the maintenance of the cameras, getting to know what this and that was for.

As a 'clapper boy', or, as some liked to be called, 'second camera assistant', I worked on various productions such as *Lightning Conductor* with Gordon Harker, *This Man is News*, with Barry K Barnes and Valerie Hobson, *Young and Innocent*, directed by Alfred Hitchcock, and one of the first three strip colour films, *The Mikado*. One of my jobs on the film was to measure the light levels on the backing. They were using naked arc lamps. Little did I know that they could damage your eyes if you didn't wear dark glasses. After a few days, I finished up with two fireballs as eyes, and was rushed off to Moorfields Eye Hospital. There was no permanent damage and I was back on the set after a day or two's rest, none the worse for my experience but a lot wiser.

Kicking the Moon Around was one of the many other films I worked on at Pinewood Studios, with Bert Ambrose and his band with a singer from America, Harry Richman. He had just flown the Atlantic Ocean in a plane with its wings full of ping-pong balls, or should I say table tennis balls? Anyway, it was a load of balls. The idea was that if he came down in the sea, the plane would float. He landed in Ireland, not in the sea, and brought over Maureen O'Hara to be in the film, her very first I think.

Now, being bright-eyed and bushy-tailed and handsome – well, I thought so – I fancied my chances. I'm afraid she didn't even notice me as I stood in front of her with my clapper board, calling out,

'Scene ten, take one' and ending with a big bang on my clapper. Her eyes were on someone else, for I lost out altogether with Maureen. She went and married assistant director George Brown. So ended my first romance.

I left Pinewood Studios to go freelance and work on another Hitchcock film, *Jamaica Inn*, at Elstree Studios, Borehamwood. Having been on the permanent staff at Pinewood Studios, it was my first film where I was contracted as camera assistant on the second unit, at the grand sum of £4 a week. Out of that, I had to pay my union subs of sixpence a week.

The second unit were filming the shipwreck scenes, a very wet job as I was to find out. A number of towers were erected with tip tanks on top, with some hundreds of gallons of water inside. They were tipped down a chute to hit the side of a full-size model of a ship to give the effect of a storm at sea. Yes, a very wet job, but like many other effect shots we did, I found it an interesting side of filming I hadn't experienced before.

Working with Hitchcock for the second time was a great experience even though I was a very small part of a very big unit. In my position I had little time to study the great man at work but always had the impression Hitch was the man in charge of a well organised creative film production unit, with crew and artists giving their best to a man

who was a great film director – it was good to tell my friends I had worked on a Hitchcock film.

It was while working at Pinewood Studios, and later at Elstree, that a number of young film technicians, myself included, got together to form a club called 'The Sprockets'. With two 16mm cameras, and a script written by two or three of us, we would go out at weekends with our girlfriends to shoot our masterpiece.

Now, 16mm film was very much an amateur film in those days. Using black and white reversal stock, we only had one print from which to edit, so there was only ever one copy of our masterpiece to keep as a record.

One such film we made was called *Odds on the Favourite*, a horse racing film, using my father's office as the villain's bookmaking office, and Epsom race track the background for all the race scenes. Yours truly played the part of a kind-hearted vicar who put his shirt on a horse to save the family home. I'm not sure whose home, but I think it

was his girlfriend's... Well, some vicars do have one. I still have the copy of that film. One day I'll transfer it to tape to show to all my friends.

A welcome member to the club was Tommy Johns, a dental mechanic. Not that any of us wanted a new set of teeth, but his father owned a pub with a large room where we could build our film sets and film some of our interiors with a small amount of lights. We made three or four films, all silent epics. It shows what enthusiasm we had in those days. Such enthusiasm was short-lived. The war came along and we all went our different ways.

2

THE WAR

I was between pictures when I got my call-up papers late in 1939. Posted to Cromer on the East coast to a training depot, it was a shock to my system when I was told to report to the quartermaster's store to collect a palliasse and fill it with straw, and then be handed three blankets with no sheets, which was to be my bed for the next six weeks.

Billeted in an empty hotel on the seafront, the next six weeks were going to be tough. How I missed my nice soft bed and that gentle, kind voice bringing me a cup of tea and saying 'Come on dear, it's time to get up.' All I got now was 'Rise and shine, my lads' at six in the morning, from a six-foot sergeant major.

The six long weeks consisted of various drills, marching and weaponry. We were always counting one, two, three. Every move was done to numbers; I used to go to sleep at night counting sheep. One, two, three, one, two, three.

Driving heavy goods vehicles was part of the training, as we were about to be posted to a Royal Army Service Corps unit. After those six weeks' training, I was posted to a Royal Army Service unit as a driver. It was the 31st Transport Company near Oxford, ready to go to France.

I had yet more training, was promoted to corporal, and was then off to France. France to me was like a bad dream. For a long time, the unit sat around with little to do, cleaning vehicles and other odd jobs, not sure where this so-called war was. Then it all changed. I was sent with a driver to deliver ammunition to a forward unit just over the border in Belgium in a town called Tournai. Reaching the outskirts, it seemed I had at last found the war. The sky was full of German Stuker bombers and the town a mass of flames and smoke. This was the start of the end.

We were stopped by a military policeman and told to turn our vehicle around and head back to Dunkirk. I explained that I had ammunition to deliver to an ack-ack unit in the town, he said his orders were to turn all vehicles around, as the Germans had broken through and taken the town, or were about to.

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Heading back to Dunkirk, we were guided by a column of smoke. On reaching Dunkirk, we were told to drive the vehicle on to a field and immobilise it by smashing the engine. It was all rather bewildering.

The beach was an amazing sight of columns of troops along the seafront, waiting to board the armada of small ships. Joining one such column, I reached the head only to be turned away as a straggler and not one of that unit. This happened two or three times, such was the discipline of this organised disaster. I was almost ashamed to be British. It looked as if the whole of the British Army was running away.

I spent three long days and nights on that beach. What happened to the driver who was with me? To this day I don't know. I remember lying on the beach with him during the enemy aircraft strafing of the area. After that, my mind is a blank. Did he live, or did he die? Maybe he was taken prisoner.

On the third day, I joined a column heading for the Mole. I remember standing in the line of troops. Next thing, I found myself lying in the road. I must have fallen asleep. Getting to my feet, I rejoined the column and made it to the Mole.

The Germans were now shelling the area and attacking from the air. The one thought in my mind was: 'I've made it this far. They aren't going to get me now.'

I had no sooner boarded a small naval ship, than I found myself in the water. It had been sunk by a direct hit. I was fished out of the water along with others, then helped aboard a cross-Channel ferry. Heading for home, I lay down on the deck and said a short prayer.

My one regret was that I didn't have a camera with me to record those amazing scenes on the beaches of Dunkirk. Was any film record made? I don't think so, not on the beach itself. That's why the Army Film and Photograph Unit was formed some time later.

Arriving back in England, I was given a travel voucher, and told that I would be sent orders as to where to report at a later date. I made my way home in my pathetic state. You can imagine the shock my father got when his rather bedraggled prodigal son walked through the door.

I received my orders to report to the 31st Motor Coach Company RASC at Haverfordwest in South Wales. We were attached to the Royal West Kents, and in case of an invasion we would transport them to the area in 32-seater coaches. They had been commandeered and camouflaged to look the part, as most of the Army transport had been left in France.

I was promoted to the rank of sergeant and put in charge of 'C'

Section, consisting of six coaches with drivers, and two corporals. Riding on a motor-bike, with one of the corporals ahead of my six coaches, what a grand sight we made travelling the roads of South Wales, taking the troops of the Royal West Kents on exercise ready for that invasion that never came.

I remember one day, we were riding on our bikes at the head of those six coaches feeling rather important when Corporal Merchant saw a little cracker on the other side of the road. Taking his eyes off the road ahead for a second look, he finished up wrapped around a bollard in the middle of the road. We called it a self-inflicted wound, a broken arm.

One morning, I saw on company orders, posted on the notice board, that anyone with experience in the film industry or still photography should report to the company office for an interview regarding transfer to the Army Film and Photographic Unit. In no time at all, I was in the office with my application.

I was sent up to London to the Marylebone Hotel for an interview. The board consisted of three officers. Two of them I didn't know but the third was Major David Macdonald who was in charge of the interview. He was a film director I had worked with on two or three productions at Pinewood Studios. I was in.

3

THE ARMY FILM AND PHOTOGRAPHIC UNIT

Number one Army Film and Photographic was formed in 1941 in London. It consisted of 26 Sergeant Cameramen – still and movie – under the command of Major David Macdonald. We were shipped out to Cairo in November 1941, and attached to the 8th Army to cover the desert war.

I was one of those sergeants that arrived in Cairo ready to film the desert campaign, but no cameras. A shipment of cameras should have arrived from America, but the ship had sunk on the way. That gave us some time in Cairo before the next consignment arrived. After seeing it, I felt that it should have gone the same way as the first – to the bottom of the sea.

The camera was called a De Vry. We re-named it the 'Sardine Tin'. It was without a doubt the worst 35mm camera I have ever seen. It was a square tin box with a wide-angle lens, claw movement, and no register pins. It took 100-foot daylight-loading spools and had a viewfinder you had a job to see through. The net result was that at least 20% of all film shot on this terrible camera was edge-fogged, scratched or unsteady.

Sergeant Garnham was the camera mechanic given the job of making these cameras work. He did a great job and made one or two improvements. One was a long focus lens, a six-inch Woolansack. The name went well with 'Sardine Tin'.

There were also two Eyemo 35mm cameras, with with a 12-inch lens and a turret to accommodate other lenses, a great improvement on the De Vry. Being a very good friend of the said Sergeant Garnham, it was only natural that I should find myself with one.

My first operational attachment was with the 9th Battalion Rifle Brigade who were operating a mobile column behind the German lines, attacking their supply lines.

These were early days of the Army Film Unit. We had no transport of our own and operated as individual cameramen relying on transport

provided by the battalion to which we were attached, covering any action they were involved in. I found it hard to get them to take me seriously. You would get the odd remark; 'Going to take my photograph, Sarg?' or 'Is that all you've got, a camera?' I did have a .38 revolver, but that never came out of its holster. It was hard in those early days to prove ourselves as combat cameramen.

Attached to HQ Company, and relying on their transport, the coverage I could get was limited. My needs were secondary to theirs. I filmed various air attacks on the column, and our guns firing, but most of the action was at long range. It was hard to get any enemy involvement. Yes, it was early days and we had a lot to learn but knowing that any film shot would be used back home on the

newsreels, or just for records, you made the effort to film whatever action you could – even if it was only the troops brewing up!

I had been operating for some time and exposed all of my film stock, so it was decided to return to Army HQ to dispatch my exposed

film and collect more. With a sergeant from the Rifle Brigade driving, we set off in a 15cwt truck, heading across the desert. How that sergeant found his way I'll never know. I'm no navigator and lost with a compass. Give me an exposure meter any day.

Having reached Army HQ and replenished my film stock, we started on our way back. We were way down south with miles of empty desert and not a thing in sight, when a German plane flew overhead. Seeing our vehicle, he turned and made a low pass over us. As he turned to make yet another, the sergeant put the starting handle on the accelerator and shouted 'Jump out!' We hit the desert together while the truck went on. The plane made his final run firing his guns. Giving a victory wave, he disappeared in the distance.

It was quite some walk to get to the vehicle. It must have been all of three miles and the desert is no place to go walking in the midday sun. Who knows what stopped the truck? All it had was a few holes in the door. My camera was still in the vehicle. Another war episode went unrecorded.

I stayed with the Rifle Brigade until the Germans pushed the 8th

Army back to El Alamein, retaking Tobruk on the way. There was little chance of filming, except the odd tank on the move. That Rifle Brigade sergeant wasn't hanging around while I took pretty pictures of the advancing German troops.

My short stay with the 9th Rifle Brigade was my first experience as a so-called combat cameraman. As a member of what was a very newly-formed unit in the British Army, my job was solely to record the events of the desert campaign on film for use on newsreels back home and for army records. All of it can now be found at the Imperial War Museum.

I found it frustrating as a cameraman to operate under the conditions that prevailed in the Rifle Brigade. I was attached to a fighting unit who were not sure just what a sergeant was doing with a camera, why he was doing it and what part it played in fighting the German Army. It was early days and we had a lot to learn.

On returning to 8th Army HQ, the Army Film Unit was re-organised. Movie and still cameramen would now work as a team with a jeep as their transport. They would be given freedom of movement to cover any action that might take place. They would be operating from Army HQ and would not be attached to any battalion. We had our own rations and bed roll, and I even had a small bivouac I had found on a knocked-out German tank. We were self-contained units ready to go wherever the action was.

The battle of El Alamein was the start of the film *Desert Victory*. A lot of footage I shot during that campaign went into that film. Covering the night barrage, the Eyemo camera came into its own. I could turn the camera at a slow speed to get enough exposure and make those guns look as if they were firing much faster. That was something the old 'Sardine Tin' (De Vry) couldn't do.

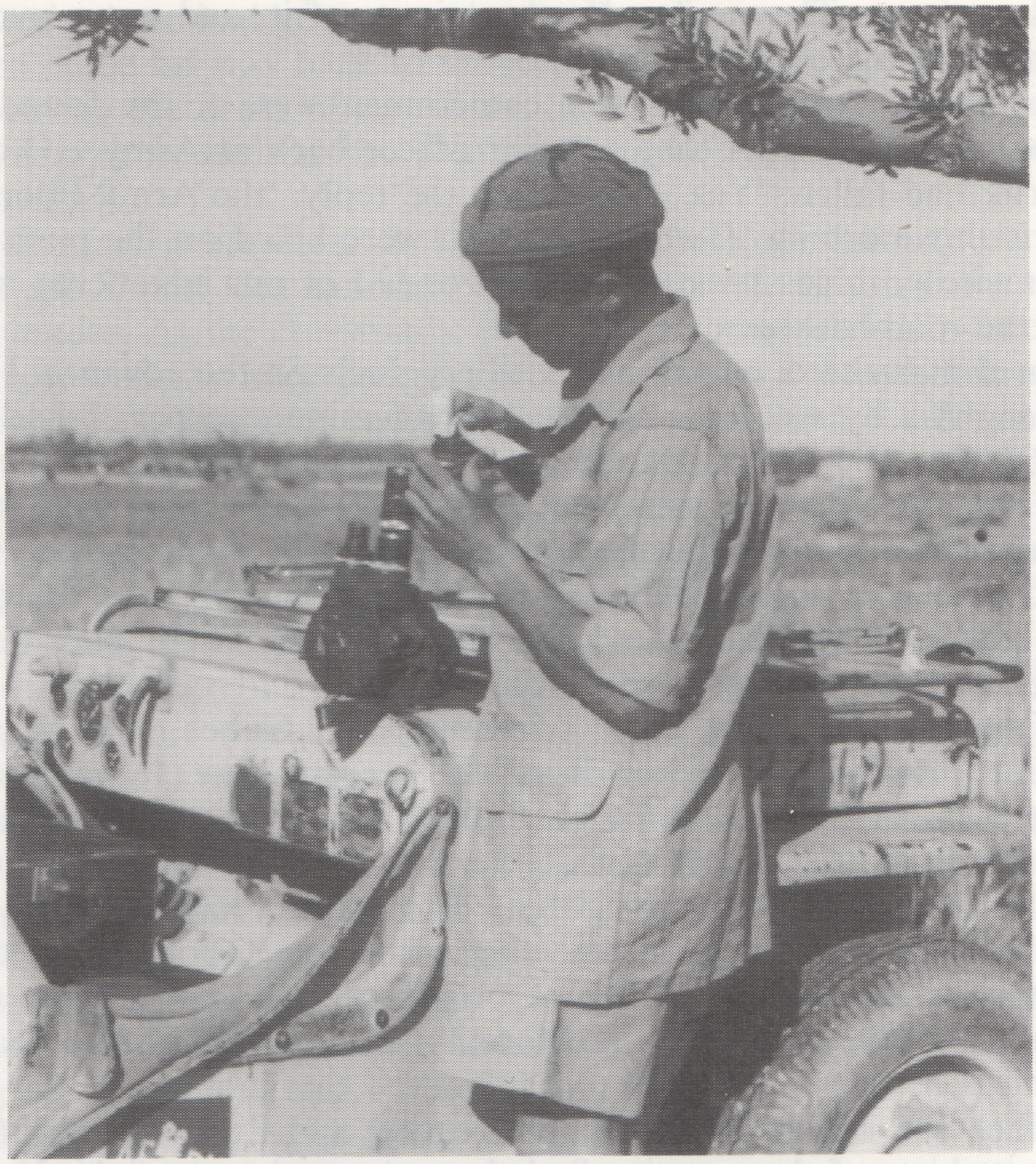
After the Germans had re-taken Tobruk, the 8th Army made a raid on the town from the sea which went very wrong. My friend, Sergeant Graham Crapper, was killed filming the raid and Captain Arthur Graham was taken prisoner. Arthur tells the story of how he was photographed by a German cameraman using an Arriflex camera which was far superior to any camera we had. The Arriflex is a camera which is still in use today.

The push out of El Alamein was the start of big tank battles. Major Keating and myself left Army HQ to film, and one such battle was

followed by a war correspondent. Having taken cover behind one of our tanks, I wondered what we had got ourselves into. High explosive and armour-piercing shells were landing all around us. It made great pictures but it was no place to stay too long if you were not in a tank. In fact it wouldn't have been the greatest place to stay even if you were in one! Looking round for the war correspondent, all I could see was his jeep disappearing in the distance. This was no slur on war correspondents, as they did as well as any Army Film Unit cameraman under fire, and they suffered their losses as did we.

Now, the said disappearing war correspondent had been spending most of his time around the pyramids filming so-called action material, even to the extent of using our own troops dressed up as Germans and sending this film back as the real thing. We should remember that four Army Film Unit cameramen were killed, five wounded and four taken prisoner – that was out of a unit of only 26 sergeant cameramen and was one of the highest casualty rates compared with the size of the unit. As a lot of this phony material was used in *Desert Victory*, no justice was done to those Army Film Unit cameramen who died trying to film the real thing in the desert. I know some filming was done at Pinewood Studios for *Desert Victory* but there was no attempt to hide the fact and misrepresent that footage. *Desert Victory* won acclaim as one of the best war films ever made.

The unfortunate outcome of all this was that, because this film shot around the pyramids received so much attention back home when it was shown on the newsreels, someone in the unit, under pressure from



London, gave permission to set a unit up to shoot very much the same thing. It was the so-called 'Cetwyn's Circus', named after the sergeant in charge. They filmed very much the same way as the correspondent did around the pyramids. They didn't go as far as using our own troops as the enemy but filmed back at base using a few bangs and a bit of smoke. It was all very wrong and should not have been done. It didn't go down well with the cameramen who were up at the sharp end of things.

I must confess I fell into the trap once. Working with Major Keating we had formed a strong partnership after El Alamein. We came across the Gurkhas. They had just fought a big battle and had the Germans on the run. Arriving after it was all over and being Gurkhas, they insisted we film them in action. In my defence I will say they were the same troops that had just fought a big battle and it was the same location at the front line. However, some of their dying scenes would have done Marlon Brando credit. They are great fighters

but lousy actors. They enjoyed every minute of it, and not a pyramid in sight. I rest my case.

Most of the Army Film Unit cameramen were to be found well forward. The story goes that a senior officer back at Army HQ asked if Tobruk had fallen. 'Yes,' came back the reply, 'the Army Film Unit filmed it this morning.' Two cameramen were killed on the push from El Alamein by mines because they got ahead of our advancing troops before the road had been cleared.

I filmed many tank battles and artillery duels on the advance. I went into Benghazi by sea on a South African mine sweeper. I had shot some 6,000 or 7,000 feet of film, a lot of which found its way into *Desert Victory*. By the time we reached Tripoli, there was not a scratch. On the film yes, but not on me. During a short rest in Tripoli we had a chance to see some of the film we had shot in the desert which had also covered Churchill's visit. We then went back to our real job filming the advance to Tunis.

The advance was held up at Medenine and Gabes. The Germans had built a defensive position called the Mareth Line. It was the last big battle the Afrika Corps fought before Tunis. They suffered heavy losses. Some of the film I shot at the Mareth Line was some of the best of the whole desert campaign. The terrain had changed. The desert was gone and now more villages and vegetation meant closer contact with the enemy, plenty of prisoners and knocked-out tanks and vehicles. The battle at the Mareth Line opened up the road to Tunis.

My luck ran out at Tunis. Major Keating and I arrived in our jeep at the outskirts of the town to find the armoured cars of the Hussars about to enter the town. As the first one went forward, it met heavy small arms fire. Laying down smoke, it pulled back to see the effect. Having discouraged a small band of German infantry to put up any sort of opposition, it went forward again. As the second armoured car followed, I jumped on the back leaving Keating shouting, 'Where do you think you are going?' I had been operating with Keating for some time now. This was a situation that had happened before, always trying to top each other. He was a great officer and a very good friend. The sergeant and officer relationship never came into it. We were Bill and Geoffrey.

Geoffrey Keating was a tough number to follow. I remember once we were about to cover a tank battle and another sergeant had come along with us. As we were about to climb the ridge to get behind a tank for protection from enemy fire, the other sergeant said, 'I'm not going up there.' With that, Keating took out his revolver and said, 'You're going up there. If you don't I'll shoot you.' By this time the

sergeant's nerve had gone completely. Revolver or no revolver, he was off and made his way back to the jeep. After being put on a charge for not obeying the order of an officer, he was returned to his old unit. It was for reasons such as this that not everybody liked Major Geoffrey Keating, MC.

I got some great shots as I sat on the back of that armoured car going into Tunis. German troops had their hands held high in a token of surrender. At the crossroads, the armoured car turned to face down the road, with my back facing a block of flats. I suddenly felt a sharp pain in my exposed rear end. A sniper had fired from the flats and got me in the backside. Shouting to the crew of the armoured car, they turned their gun around to fire into the flats, leaving me still on the back looking down the road. Along that road came a German car with two officers in it. Shouting to the crew once again, we turned around. One of the Germans threw a hand grenade. It hit the side of the armoured car but didn't explode. The crew opened fire and both German officers were killed. As for that hand grenade, well, they didn't call me 'Lucky' Jordan for nothing.

Now I hadn't shot a single foot of film during the whole episode. Each time I was facing in the wrong direction. As I told the story to the rest of the unit about the wound in my backside, I made it clear I wasn't running away, just facing in the wrong direction. A German doctor took the bullet out of my rear. He had stayed in the hospital to look after German wounded. It had only just penetrated the skin. A patch on the wound and I was fighting fit again. From then on I was called the man with two holes in his backside plus a few other rude remarks.

At Tunis, No.1 and No.2 units joined up. As No.2 had come down from North Africa with the Americans, it wasn't a happy marriage. No.1 was always going to be the 'Desert Rats', the original Army Film and Photographic Unit. I remember that first night when Geoffrey Keating unrolled his sleeping bag and found two scorpions inside. I guess his reputation had gone before him.

After Tunis, we followed through to Cap Bon where the Afrika Corps surrendered. It reminded me of Dunkirk. There were thousands of German troops with nowhere to go. Unlike Dunkirk, they had no small ships to take them away.

Driving down the line of troops, we were approached by two German officers speaking perfect English. They asked if we would give them a lift to the prisoner-of-war camp. On the way one of the officers said that the German and the British were great fighters but we both had our problems. They had the Italians and we had the Americans. I couldn't answer that as I hadn't met either yet.

The Army Film Unit had come of age. After the experience of the Desert and Tunisian campaigns we were no longer those odd so-called soldiers going into action with a camera. We had proved ourselves under the most adverse conditions, both officers and sergeants. Two great films were to come out of our efforts – *Desert Victory* and *Tunisian Victory*. Casualties were high for such a small unit. Three were killed by mines, seven wounded, and a couple taken prisoner. I know we did no more than any other fighting soldier but the Army certainly didn't regard us as non-combatants, though technically that's what we were.

After an uncertain start, we re-organised after El Alamein. We operated as small units. With two sergeants per jeep – one cine, one stills – our own rations and sleeping bags, we were able to operate wherever the action was. We would report back to our base at Army HQ to replenish our film stock and return our exposed film negative.

I know that *Desert Victory* and *Tunisian Victory* owed some of their professionalism to the material shot at Pinewood Studios, now the base of all services film units. However, without the battle material shot in the desert and Tunisia there would have been no films.

No.1 and No.2 units were now well and truly integrated. The 'Desert Rats' had got the sand out of their boots and had welcomed in their friends who had come down from the north. With the increase in the number of cameramen, we could concentrate the coverage of any one action with the use of more than one unit – say two or three covering the same area.

Back at Tripoli, we got ready for the invasion of Sicily. I was attached to the Black Watch for the assault landing. It was almost

unopposed though I did get rather wet coming off that landing craft into six foot of water with camera held high. That's another one of my nicknames – 'Shorty'. Little film was exposed in Sicily. I don't think the Germans had time to re-organise, and the Italians had all gone home. I think that the German officer had been right about the Italians.

I saw little action until we reached Taormina. Then my luck ran out again. A bridge just outside Taormina had been blown up by the retreating Germans and the Sappers were sweeping for mines to clear the way for our advancing troops. Leaving me to film the Sappers, Geoffrey Keating went on into Taormina. As I was filming the Sappers, one of them got a reading on his detector. As he took another step forward, stopping to pick up a piece of shrapnel, he stepped on an anti-personnel mine. A charge underneath it sent a canister six feet in the air. That then exploded sending ball bearings in all directions. The Sapper and his sergeant were killed. I got two in my left leg, three in my left arm and one put a deep cut in my head. I sat on a milestone by the blown bridge feeling very sorry for myself. I was evacuated to a base hospital in North Africa. I heard later that Geoffrey Keating went into Taormina and captured 400 Italians single-handed. Sounded like Keating to me!

I spent a few days in hospital having those ball bearings removed, then transferred to a transit camp. In front of the commanding officer, I was asked what unit I was from.

'Army Film Unit, sir.'

'What, you show films back at base?'

'No, sir, take action film at the front.' He wasn't impressed.

'You will be transferred to the infantry in the next few days.' Now I wasn't impressed.

Two days later, I was called back to the CO's office. A rather sheepish-looking commanding officer with a letter in front of him said, 'I have received orders from 8th Army HQ that you are to be returned there immediately.' An order from the man himself. Geoffrey Keating had pulled a few strings. The CO also handed me a letter from Keating to say I had been awarded the Military Medal.

On my return to Army HQ, I was presented with the ribbon of the Military Medal by Montgomery. I received the medal, with a letter from the King, when I got home.

I was soon back in action covering the assault landing at Anzio, ready to march into Rome. It never happened. We never did break out of that bridgehead. I remember operating with Slim Hewitt. Slim was the stills man, and we were on our way up to the forward positions going through a factory compound when Slim saw a chicken. Now,

having been on bully beef and biscuits for the past few weeks, Slim had the grand idea of a chicken supper that night. So, with a piece of string round its leg, he tied it to a post to be collected on the way back. Unfortunately, we ran into a bit of trouble after that with some heavy mortar fire. Beating a hasty retreat, we forgot about the poor chicken. It probably finished up on some German or Italian dinner plate.

Anzio was an operation that started well but never achieved its aim to cut the German supply line and put our troops on the road to Rome by cutting route six, which was the main road from Cassino to Rome.

Covering the assault landing, there was little opposition. Once the bridgehead had been secured, little action was taking place. The Germans had brought up reinforcements and the situation became a stalemate with little to film except the odd air raid or shelling. That's why Slim and I went walkabouts looking for more action to film.

As the stalemate grew, we were called back to HQ and sent to Cassino. I teamed up this time with Bill McConville as the stills man. Cassino was tough going and the Americans didn't help with their

saturation bombing. The first wave of bombs would be near the target which was the monastery. After that, they fell shorter and shorter. A few of them fell around me and I was five or six miles away from the target. I did hear that they bombed Army HQ. Maybe that German officer at Cap Bon was right about the Americans too!

Four or more cameramen were operating at Cassino. We had found a derelict church about two miles from Cassino and made that our base. It wasn't that we were seeking protection from the one above – more that the battle for the town and the monastery was going to be a long and frustrating one and we could plan our coverage day by day with a base. With our jeeps as transport, we would drive as close as we could to film any activity that was taking place. But the Germans had the area so well covered that any movement on the ground was met with mortar or small arms fire.

One day, as Bill McConville and I were driving back, we found an abandoned armoured scout car. Well, we thought it was abandoned. Either that or the driver had gone off for a cup of tea. Thinking it would make an excellent camera car, giving a certain amount of protection when filming, I got into it to see if it was in working order. To my amazement, it was all ready to drive away.

Back at our church, I made a camera mount so that we could operate the cameras from inside the vehicle. I had a grand thought of

driving into Cassino, camera turning, getting the greatest film of the war.

It was all a pipe dream. We only got a few yards from the church when it ran out of fuel so we abandoned it.

I came back from Cassino to Army HQ for more film stock and stayed a couple of days. On the second day, Captain Alan Watson came up to me and said, 'You're on guard tonight.' At Army HQ, each unit was expected to mount its own guard, even the Film Unit. 'Oh, no I'm not. Find someone else. I'm back to Cassino tomorrow.' Now, there was always that little bit of friction between the No.1 and No.2 units and Alan was a member of No.2. With that he said, 'You're on a charge in the morning for disobeying an officer.' Discipline in the unit was very lax, in fact almost non-existent. It was Sid, Jack, Tom whatever your rank. I felt that we were cameramen first, then soldiers. I knew that I was pushing my luck but on a charge I was.

The next morning, the Sergeant Major marched me in front of the Commanding Officer who was none other than David Macdonald. It was cap off, one two three, and all of that. The charge was read out. David wasn't quite sure what to do or say. In a quiet voice he said, 'Case dismissed.' Then he added, 'Why don't you two go away and sort your problems out.' The Sergeant Major was lost for words.

The battle of Cassino had been going on for some time and had been well-reported back home. A message from London said they weren't getting enough coverage from the Film Unit on the battle. This was passed down the line to the four of us sergeants at Cassino. I was operating with Bill McConville. We decided to have a go at getting into the town, or at least to Castle Hil. My first objective was a tall building on the outskirts of the town. They say the one above sees all, and with the combination of a high vantage point and my long focus lens, I got some good shots of the monastery and Castle Hill after it came under heavy enemy fire. I beat a hasty retreat, making my way along the road on all-fours from shell hole to shell hole. I had almost reached Castle Hill but every time I put my head up to get a shot, I came under heavy enemy fire. Abandoning my attempt, I crawled back to relative safety.

I found a party of medics who had made their base in a bomb-damaged building. They saw my camera and asked who I was. I convinced them that I was not a tourist taking holiday snaps. They said that they were going out to pick up wounded and why didn't I come along. They handed me a Red Cross armband but I refused it. We set off down the road. Then I saw it, the picture that told the whole story. On the left, high up, were the ruins of the monastery. To

the right was Castle Hill. The cameraman was taking over from the soldier. I let the medics get some ten yards in front of me to complete the composition and went down on one knee. The camera never turned. A German mortar bomb landed by my side. I came to four days later in a field hospital.

I was told that I was left for dead at first but was picked up later. I had been hit in the mouth and lost my front teeth. So I was bleeding from the mouth and my whole body and both legs were pitted with shrapnel. My left arm was almost severed and a large piece of shrapnel had entered just above the left groin and finished up under my ribs. I must have taken the full blast of that German mortar bomb. It must have had my name written all over it. I have often wondered if I should have worn that Red Cross armband.

I think that the major surgery I had in that field hospital was nothing short of a miracle. My left arm was put in plaster and my other wounds were attended to. Then I was cut, in fact nearly kippered, from the base of my abdomen to my ribs to remove the large piece of shrapnel and repair the damage to my large and small intestine. It was all put back again, I had drain tubes up my nose and was kept alive on a saline drip. I owe my life to that surgeon.

I never did make it into Cassino or to the top of the monastery but Bill McConville, with whom I was working at the time I was wounded, did. Some years later at one of our reunions he presented me with a plate he had found intact in the monastery ruins. It had the monastery crest on it.

Bill McConville went on to Florence where he unfortunately lost a leg after stepping on an anti-personnel mine. He had a great fighting spirit and, with only one leg, went on in later life to become one of the finest newsreel cameramen, travelling the world and producing some great news stories for the BBC.

War can make people very cruel. At the time I was wounded, I was wearing a gold watch and strap my father gave me when I left England. When I woke up in that field hospital, my watch had gone.

After I was fit enough to be moved, I was sent down to a base hospital in Naples. After a short stay, I was put on a hospital ship bound for home. Lying in my cot on that hospital ship, I asked an orderly the ship's name. To my amazement he said, *Atlantis*. It was the very same ship on which my father had taken me on a Mediterranean cruise, after my mother died, when I was twelve years old.

When I arrived back home, my father came to see me in hospital. He was most concerned. The first thing he asked me was whether I still had both arms and legs because the cable he'd received from the war office said that I had been critically wounded. 'Yes,' I said.

'They're just knocked about a bit.'

I spent a few months in hospital and convalescence. I was about to be discharged from the army when a request was made for me to be posted to Pinewood Studios, of all places. It was now the home of the Army, Navy and Air Force Film Units and I was to be an instructor on battle photography.

With a medical grade C2 I was excused just about everything down to my boots. How the sergeant major there hated me. He used to call me 'civilian attached'. I didn't even make a good instructor. I thought there was too much army training and not enough photographic knowledge so I only took two courses, one lot Canadians, the other Polish.

'I was sent then on the *Queen Elizabeth* which was taking American wounded back to the USA. With Captain Glendenning and Alfie Oldham, we were to film their homecoming. How glad the sergeant major at Pinewood was to see the back of me. He could now sleep peacefully at night. Arriving up the Hudson River, we were met by a tug with the Andrew Sisters aboard singing *Drinking Rum and Coca-Cola*. I had a few of those later on.

I gave a lecture on battle photography at the Army Photographic School and spent the rest of the time looking around New York. I was in New York on VE Day. What a day and night! At every bar and café Alfie and I went to, we were given free drinks and made a great fuss of. We were carried shoulder-high around Times Square. It went on until the early hours and I was put to bed by a gorgeous blonde. Or did I just dream that? I woke up with a hell of a hangover and thought that I was back at Cassino.

Returning from America, I was approached by Associated British Pathé to become a newsreel cameraman. I was recommended by David MacDonald to Howard Thomas, the producer-in-chief. I was released from the unit for a two-week trial period.

I suppose that I was lucky to come through my experience as a combat cameraman with the 8th Army in one piece. A bit dented maybe but with all my working parts intact.

It's hard to describe the feeling you have when you have a camera in your hand in those circumstances. Looking through the viewfinder with your concentration on that small picture area gives you a false sense of security. What else is going on around you just doesn't register. When I was covering all those tank battles, with armour-piercing and high-explosive shells exploding all around me, my one concern was getting the composition right – tank in the foreground with the explosions going off all around it. Take the camera down from your eye and the situation becomes clear. What the hell am I

doing here! This is no film set, this is for real!

One reason for the high casualty rate in the unit was this approach to filming. It's not so much an act of bravery but more that you are so intent on getting that one good action shot, you make yourself a sitting target. I paid the price for this approach at Cassino. There's a feeling of security looking through the camera. Once that machine is out of your hands, you see the real situation and realise that you've gone too far. A perfect example is the two Army Film Unit cameramen serving at a later date in France. So keen were they to get the action first, they got in front of our forward troops and ran straight into a German 88mm gun. Both were killed.

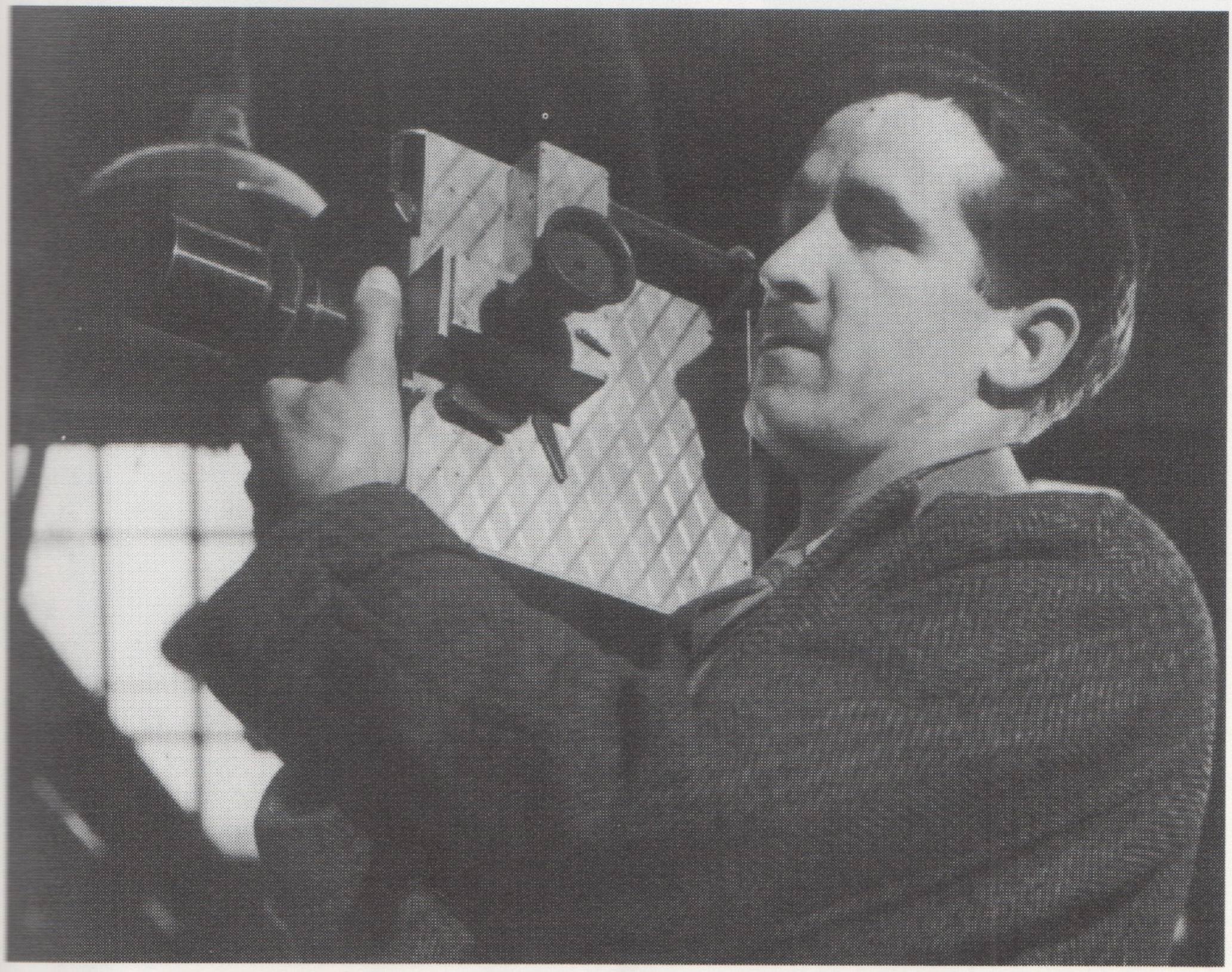
It's hard not to resort to cinematic reconstruction. It may be valid if done in the right place, in fact. Whether it be shot in a film studio or on actual location, and even if it is based on true facts, I think it should be accompanied by a statement to say it is a reconstruction. The cameramen of the Army Film Unit did it the hard way and paid a heavy price.

4

ASSOCIATED BRITISH PATHÉ (PATHÉ NEWS)

I never thought that I was cut out to be a newsreel cameraman, even with my experience of working on my own during the war. I had hopes of returning to feature films and working in the major studios, carrying on where I left off before the war. However, I was now a married man and the offer from Pathé Newsreel was too good to miss. So with Pathé, I started a new career as a newsreel cameraman.

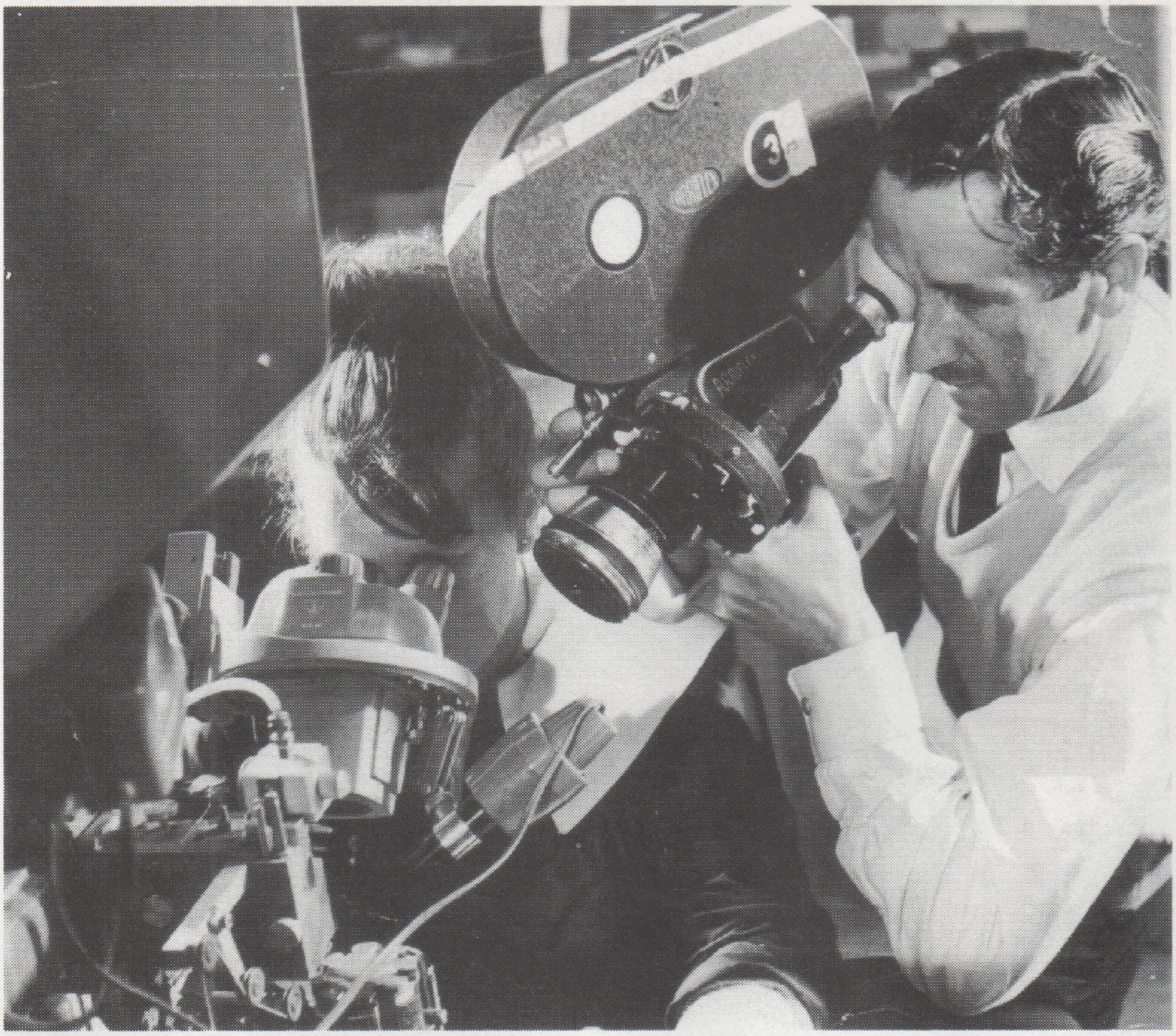
My very first story was to film a party of girls coming from Wales to work in a factory in London. I was told that they would be arriving at Paddington Station, so off I went not knowing which platform to go to or where they would be heading for. I walked around Paddington



Station like a lost soul, asking everyone in sight which platform the train from Wales would be arriving at. By the time I had found it, they had arrived and left for a destination unknown. I returned to the News Room with my pathetic story and no exposed film. What a start for a budding newsreel cameraman!

After my demob from the Army, I was offered a permanent position at Pathé as a newsreel cameraman along with another ex-Army Film Unit member, John Rudkin. There was a bit of friction between the old and the new. Jock Gemmel and Ken Gordon had been around at Pathé for some time. They were two of the best in the business with 20 or more years of experience between them. As John and I were told that we were going to be the nucleus of the new Pathé News, they saw us as two young upstarts about to take over, and it didn't go down too well.

One day a heated argument developed between John Rudkin and Ken Gordon. As it was about to come to blows, not wanting John to



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hit the older man, I stepped in and held his arms behind his back. Dear old Ken just put one right on John's chin. I roared with laughter but I don't think that John saw the funny side of it. Anyway, it defused the situation.

Combined sound and camera units in use in those days weren't very portable. The camera, a Vinten, and the sound unit were two completely different units. The sound unit was rather heavy and was usually operated from a car, and was connected to the camera via a cable.

Some of my first assignments were with Jock or Ken. They operated the sound cameras while I aimed with a silent hand-held Arriflex, the same camera the German cameramen had had at Tobruk, or at least the same model. We would operate as a team. There would be two cameramen, a sound recordist and a driver in a Ford Utility with all the gear. Now, you couldn't call this a mobile unit. Once out of the car, it took time to set up, and once in position, that's where it stayed. It was a top-heavy unit to cover any news story.

Pathé subsequently bought two combined sound cameras from America. They had an optical sound head fitted on the back so that both sound and picture could be recorded on the same film. Those units could be moved from set-up to set-up with ease, and to go with these new sound cameras went two brand new Humber cars. And to whom did these very nice new units go? To John Rudkin and Billy

Jordan. We were told by Howard Thomas that he had given us the best and it was up to us to do the rest.

It didn't go down too well with Jock and Ken but they, and other cameramen, did get to use them. Apart from these outfits, each cameraman had his own silent camera and transport. Transport was your own car and your silent camera was with you all the time. Now I was without a car at the time. I had had an old, unreliable Ford with a cracked block, so my father bought me a Sunbeam Talbot 90.

There was friendly rivalry between the five newsreels, Paramount, Universal, Movietone, Gaumont British and Pathé. On most big sports events, like the Cup Final, Wimbledon or Test Matches, we would be covering from much the same positions. But on hard news stories, it was every man for himself trying to get that exclusive coverage.

I covered various train crashes: Weedon, Harrow and others. I was on my way home one day when I heard over the radio that there had been a bad crash at St John's station, Lewisham. I was just about passing the very spot, with my camera in the car. I stopped to cover. It was without doubt the worst I had ever seen. One train had gone over the top of the other. There were lines of bodies still sitting in their seats cut in half. I found myself hardened to such scenes rather as it had been during the war. Those scenes were too horrific to be shown on the cinema screen, yet there I was standing there taking them.

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We all liked getting an exclusive. One such case was the floods at Lynmouth. Living at Norwood, very near Croydon Airport, and having heard the news, I went straight to the airport and hired a private plane to fly me there. I was one of the first cameramen on the scene. Landing the small aircraft on the hills above, I walked down following the course of the river. It made a great story. I even got a credit on the screen: 'This is the story of the floods at Lynmouth, as told by Bill Jordan'. The hiring of that plane on my expense sheets made my other fiddles acceptable.

Sport was one of the main items in the reel: football, cricket, tennis, boxing and horse racing, but what coverage can you give when the reel is only ten minutes long? A football match lasting one and a half hours would be lucky if it got maybe three minutes of screen time, with the exception of the Cup Final. That would be a special, taking the whole ten minutes. Big deal.

Now, in that one and a half hours, you were expected to get every goal and not shoot too much film, as that would slow the whole process down back at the labs and editing room. apart from the cost

of the film. Ted Bilsdon, the sports editor at Pathé, worked out a system with me to overcome this problem. It went something like this. When covering a match, you started with a few general views of the game. Then you concentrated on both goal areas. If you were lucky, you would get the goal. If not, you'd make sure to get the goalkeeper taking the ball out of the net. You'd remember who scored the goal and concentrate on him. When he got the ball, you'd let him kick it out of shot and stay on that player. Your next shot when editing was the previous one of the goalkeeper taking the ball out of the net.

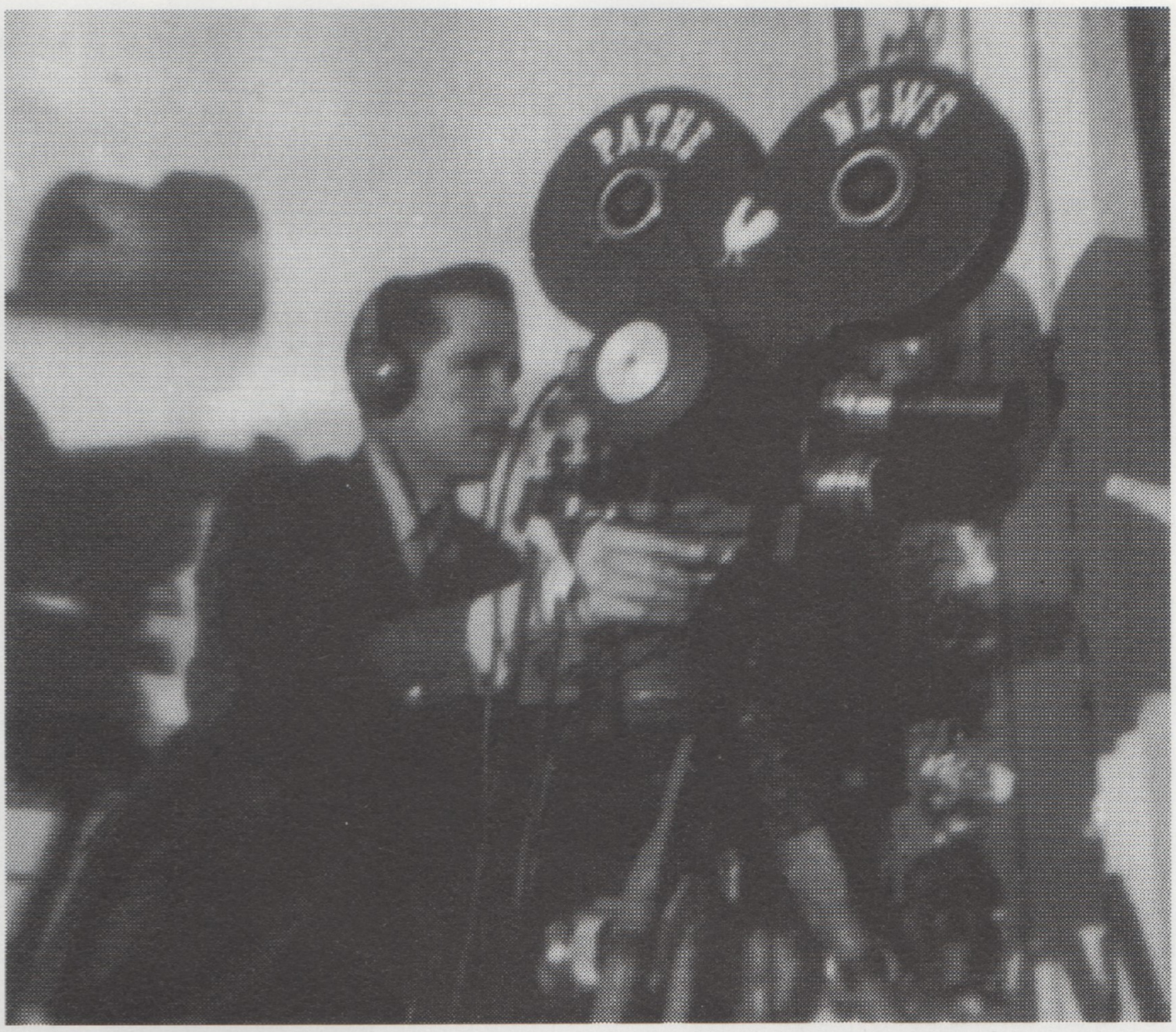
When filming football at Wembley, my position was always on a platform high up under the eaves of the main stand, covering the centre of the field of play. Now, the only way up was by ladder so you had to be in your position before the crowd came in. Then the ladder was taken away. With an hour and a half of the match and another half hour before the crowd dispersed you were up there about three hours, all five newsreels covering from the same position. As we were good newsreel men, it was the norm to have a pint or two before taking up our positions on that small platform. In case of emergencies, a tin was provided, and at the end of the match, the last man down would empty it and put it back for the next match. One year that duty was not performed so, by the next year's game, the tin had rusted and had a hole in it. When it was used, there was a mad dash to place it in a camera case before the crowd below thought that the roof was leaking!

The Grand National was the one annual event when all the newsreel cameramen got together to provide cover as a team. Each company supplied four or five cameramen to man set positions around the course. It was the one sporting event where we all got together, rather like a cameramen's outing.

Travelling up to Liverpool by train, then by coach to Aintree, we would walk round the course to check out the positions. Then it was back to our hotel for an evening of drinking. In moderation, of course! The camera positions were at each jump. Two were built into Beecher's Brook, one on the take-off side, the other on landing. Beecher's was also covered by a slow motion camera. In addition to all this, there was a camera at the start, another for the finish and two covering the paddock. So it took a number of cameramen to film the Grand National.

It changed when they built the track for cars. For most of the way, it ran parallel with the course so you could do a tracking shot from almost start to finish. I was given the opportunity to do that very first tracking shot which is now done so well by television.

Sid Randell was the Pathé camera mechanic. He mounted two cameras side by side on one tripod. One was fitted with a wide-angle



lens, the other with a close-up. That way you could have a close-up of the leading horse and still be covering the rest of the field. But it wasn't long before we lost it all to television.

Pathé had numerous freelance cameramen as stringers covering for them in many foreign countries. Foreign trips were therefore few and far between, but I managed a few. One was to cover General Neguib when he became president of Egypt. Having spent a little time in Cairo during the war, I knew my way around plus one or two words in Arabic. After shipping my story back, I stayed a few days to re-live old memories.

Another of my foreign trips was to Jordan, a country named after me. Well, I accept that it's just possible that it was the other way round. I was there to film a sort of anniversary of the Arab Legion. There were many British officers serving in the Legion. One was Bob Young who took me under his wing, providing various facilities. One of those was a trip to Petra, known in Arabic as 'the rose-red city half as old as time'. It is situated in the south-west mountains of Jordan. It was once the capital of the ancient Arab kingdom of Nabatea and was an important caravan centre. It was absorbed into the Roman Empire in AD 106 and the remains are hewn out of the red sandstone cliffs. I was filming in black and white for the newsreel. I thought that Petra would make a good colour story for Pathé Pictorial, so I cabled London for some colour stock.

Off I went to Petra. My impression was that it was not so much a

city as an ancient burial ground, with its many tombs and temples. The city gets its name from the colour of the sandstone from which it is all built. There was a great shot as you came out of the darkness of a narrow walkway to face the bright sunlight and the magnificent treasury building. It made a very impressive story. I stayed at a small hotel in the middle of Petra for a few days to give myself time to do justice to the story. Little did I know that I would be back again twice in the near future.

A goodwill visit by the navy took me to Gdansk in Poland. It was just a short stay but enough time for a few shots of the town and the people, plus a drink or two of vodka.

The revolution in Hungary saw me doing my best to get into the capital, Budapest. Travelling with a couple of reporters, first to the border between Austria and Hungary, we crossed into the country on our way to Budapest. We didn't get very far. All I managed were a few shots of some refugees before we were stopped by Russian troops and sent back.

On one occasion, I found myself back at El Alamein. I was travelling with a party of press reporters and cameramen covering the unveiling of a memorial by Field Marshal Viscount Montgomery. It was a six-day trip flying in a RAF Valetta transport plane. We spent three nights in Alexandria. It brought back many memories, with a long drive along the old desert road and a visit to the war graves of those we left behind.

Pathé started to make more use of their two sound cameras. Clement Cave joined Pathé from the *Daily Express*, as editor of the reel. He began to cover more political stories, such as strikes. John Parsons was engaged as an interviewer, one of the first on newsreel. We tried to show both sides of the question, with interviews with both

the workers and the government. We formed a team going round the country covering controversial stories doing our best to show both sides of the problem. But, as they say, you can't please all the people all of the time.

There were so many complaints from the cinema audience to the cinema managers, plus threats from the independent cinemas to stop showing the reel, that the political stories were curtailed. So it was with a somewhat lighter approach and an attempt at humour that we covered a story at a small village near a RAF bombing range. The villagers were complaining that the bombs were landing so near to the village that their houses were being damaged.

We started by showing various bits of minor damage to the village houses, such as broken windows and cracked ceilings. We then cut to an interview of a villager by his garden gate. The whine of a falling bomb drowned out the voices and the screen was blacked out by smoke as there was a very loud bang. As the smoke cleared, John Parsons was seen standing by the gate in nothing but his underpants looking very tattered, with the words: 'Yes, I suppose that is fairly close!' It may be that the village didn't think that it put their point over in a true light, but it did get it across in a light-hearted way. It was a much more humorous approach to news. The cinema audience paid to be entertained by a feature film. They didn't want to be antagonised by a political newsreel.

The Korean war had been going on for some time. Most of Pathé's coverage had come from America. It featured mainly American troops and there was little or no coverage of the Commonwealth Division. Tommy Cummins, the editor of Pathé at the time, decided to do a story on British troops spending Christmas in Korea.

Coming into the office one day, I was called into the news room and asked if I would go to Korea. It was to be a short stay just to do this story on the British troops' Christmas there. The approach for the coverage was to feature just our own troops. In each case, we would get the name of the man being interviewed and the town he came from. That way the local press in any of the towns featured would publicise the fact that the reel included some local news. At least it would get the whole family to the cinema.

This was a time when cinema as a whole was feeling the effects of television. Newsreels were having a particularly rough time doing their best to hold on to the big sporting events like the Grand National, test matches, Wimbledon, etc. The writing was on the wall. Television news could often be seen on the same day that the incidents portrayed had happened. By the time Pathé News was shown in the cinemas, it could be two or three days after the event. Those newsreels were a major

attraction in the cinemas for many years. They had always been the earliest and only source of moving images of topical news events from all over the world which were readily and cheaply available to the general public. Now with the immediacy of television, they had become yesterday's news at best, and much of their impact was lost.

5

PATHÉ NEWS KOREA

I left London Airport with two small hand cameras and loads of film stock. It was just me and my camera bound for Tokyo *en route* for Korea. The flight was on an Argonaut, about one of the noisiest aircraft ever made. It was a four-day flight to Tokyo with two overnight stops on the way. One was in Rangoon, the other in Hong Kong. When I arrived in Tokyo, a booking had been made for me at the hotel run for officers on leave from Korea. I was given my own room and provided with a uniform in khaki. I was now an official war correspondent with the United Nations.

I left Tokyo and landed in Seoul on Christmas Eve. Provided with a jeep with 'Pathé News' on it, plus a conducting officer, I had no time to acclimatise myself to the very cold weather before I set off on my 'Christmas in Korea' story.

My conducting officer, Bob Lewis, did a great job keeping up with the names and towns of origin of those troops as I photographed them doing the traditional Christmas things. They cooked the turkey – yes, they had one – and they read their letters and Christmas cards from home. Then there was the big Christmas dinner, which was quite a spread, before we set off to the forward positions to see how they were spending their Christmas.

There was little activity. Men were in their gun positions but the guns were silent. With no enemy action, all was quiet and peaceful. I had a chat with the officer-in-charge and he agreed to fire a few rounds of mortar and machine gun so I could film the men in action. As I took a close-up of the officer shouting 'Fire' the mortars and the rest of the guns around opened up. I got some great shots as the barrage fell upon the Chinese positions. My conducting officer hardly had time to take down the names of the men and their home towns before the Chinese let us have it back three-fold. I know that the commentary in the finished reel said that all was not quiet at the front on Christmas Day. It was before I arrived. I said goodbye, knowing that I wouldn't be welcome back there again!

I sent back my Christmas story and waited for a cable reporting my

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coverage and saying that I could now return home. The cable came full of congratulations, but with a PS saying: 'Suggest you stay a while and cover further stories in the same way.' Two months later, I was still there.

Now, spending Christmas in Korea was one thing, but I did not

appreciate a long stay. Still, a newsreel cameraman's life is not always a happy one. My bed was a makeshift affair on the floor of the quartermaster's store. The washing facilities were a shower out in the cold and a toilet which had to be seen to be believed: it was just a big hole in the ground with a row of seats on top. You never knew who you were going to meet sitting next to you first thing in the morning. At least in the Western Desert we had been able to go off into the blue, dig our own private little hole and leave a marker to denote foul ground.

I discovered that Scottish regiments were serving in Korea, so a story on Hogmanay was a must. The problem was that no haggis was available. Some bright spark – it must have been the sergeant major – cut a football bladder in half. Your guess is as good as mine as to what it was stuffed with, but it was piped into the mess. It was never eaten. Well, there is a limit to what even I would go for a good story.

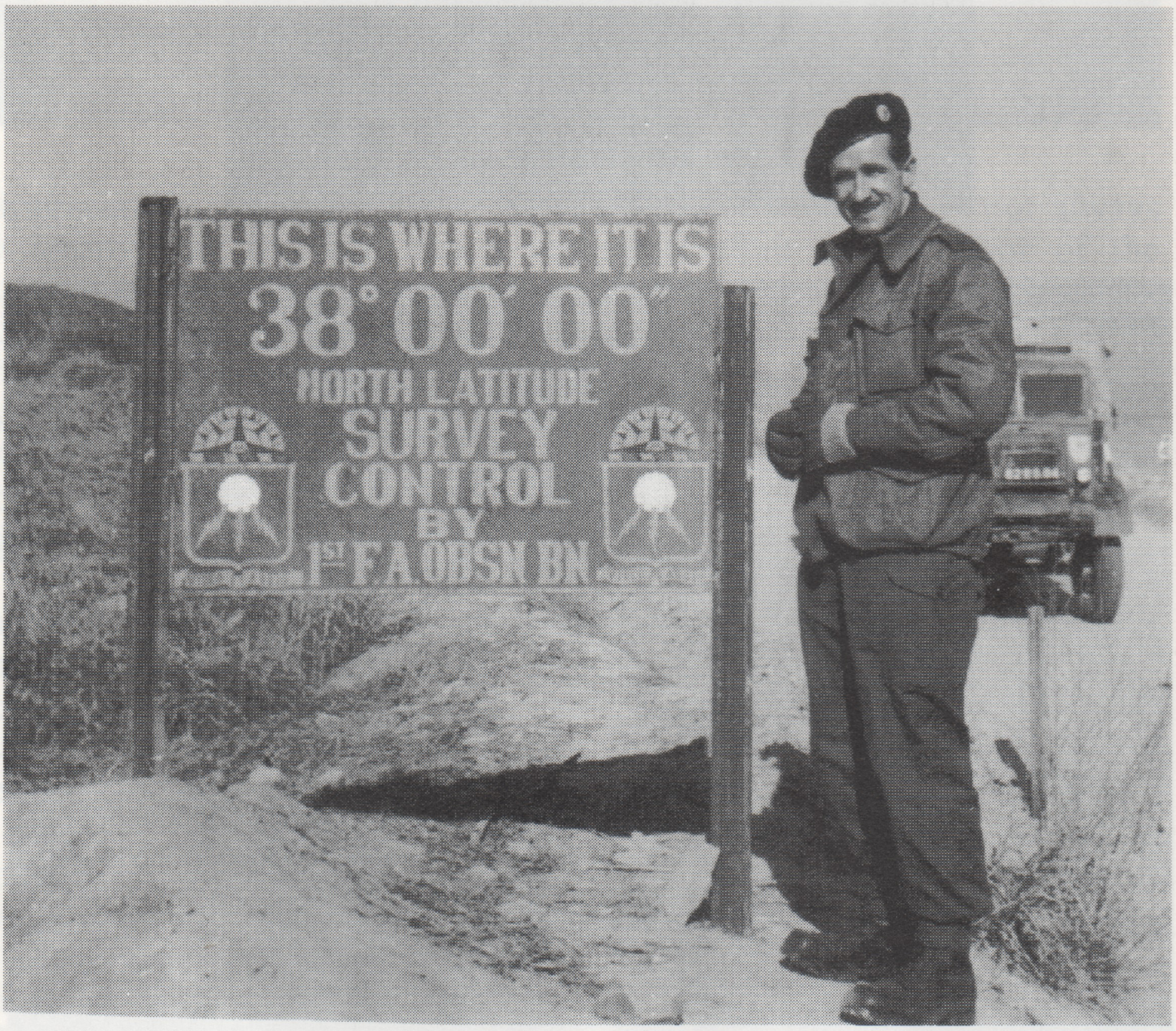
Other stories I covered were mainly at base to show a cross-section of the men serving in Korea. They were from all parts of the UK and we got all their names and the towns they came from, as per my brief.

They say it takes three men as back-up to keep one at the front lines, so my next coverage was at the Royal Engineers' workshop. Their job was to support those fighting men at the sharp end by servicing and supplying their equipment, guns, tanks, and transport, plus a

multitude of other things. It was much the same as before – men's names and the town they came from. My conducting officer did a great job as I filmed the various operations and the men doing them.

Then it was on to a mobile cinema. SKC brought back memories of North Africa and the commanding officer who thought that the Army Film Unit was just that. I put a little drama into the filming. I had the men watching the film with their guns at the ready in case of an enemy attack, even though we were some ten miles from the front line.

With the help of my conducting officer, I managed to cover many units who were serving in Korea. For a change, I flew out to the aircraft carrier HMS *Glory* operating in the East China Sea. Flying in an American aircraft, we went in to land on the flight deck. The approach was wrong and we got a wave-off at the very last moment. It was touch and go as our wheels all but hit the water. We did land at the second attempt and all we got as a greeting was a few kind words and a warm handshake. I spent three days filming routine operations



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and life on board. It was so nice to be in the warmth of the officer's mess. The toilets made a nice change as well!

I went back to the mainland to film my last story in Korea. My coverage to date had been all about British troops and their involvement, and the fighting was now almost at an end. America and China, the two major powers involved, were about to divide the country at the 38th parallel into two countries, North and South Korea.

I called that last film report: 'Front Line City'. I tried to show that the real sufferers in that war were the ordinary people of Korea. Seoul was a devastated city. Its people were lost and bewildered. They tried to keep warm with what little they had as they lived in homes built out of cardboard boxes. They ate army rations that they had begged, borrowed or stolen. As I was filming these pathetic scenes, a little boy stopped to look at me. I turned my camera on him. No more than six or seven years old, his clothes were nothing more than tattered rags. On his feet he had a pair of army boots, no doubt donated by some kind-hearted soldier. They were so big, he could hardly walk in them. In close-up, his eyes said it all. There was so much suffering in that little face. As he turned to walk away, I kept my camera turning as he disappeared into his cardboard home. That shot will live in my memory forever. These were the real victims of the Korean war. After three long months, I got my come home cable. Once again, it was full of congratulations, and once again had another PS: 'Suggest you return via Malaya and cover British troops in Malayan jungle!'

I left Korea and flew to Matsue, some 400 miles from Tokyo. I had to take the night train to Tokyo, which was an interesting experience in itself. I boarded the train to find my sleeper and discovered that the sleepers were all in one carriage. There was a long line of them, double deckers with just a curtain for privacy. Now, I would not say that I was the smartest boy in town at that moment. My three months' stay in Korea had taken its sartorial toll. As I settled down in my top bunk, the curtains parted and a pretty Japanese girl got into the bottom bunk. When I awoke, she had gone. Or was it just a dream?

Arriving in Tokyo, I went straight to the hotel – the same one I had left three months ago. I had just one thought in mind: a nice hot bath and a change back into civilian clothes. Once in my room, I went straight to the bathroom, only to find the bath all ready for me. I threw my army clothes on the floor and dived into that lovely hot bath. As I came out of the bathroom, dressed in a white dressing gown, I just caught a glimpse of a pretty Japanese chambermaid leaving the room. Was I having another illusion? No, there on the bed were my clothes, the very ones I had arrived in on my way to Korea three months ago, all clean and neatly laid out ready to wear.

I stayed in Tokyo for a week seeing the sights and having a short rest. I cabled London to say that I was on my way, and left Tokyo. It was just me and my camera bound for Singapore. I made contact with Army PR and I was once again back in uniform, this time jungle green. Leaving my civilian clothes at the hotel, I travelled on to Kuala Lumpur.

My first story was with a patrol out on reconnaissance in the jungle looking for guerrillas. Now, although I was a new boy to the jungle, no-one told me about leeches, and I wondered why it was that the patrol had binding round the bottom of their trousers. I was soon to find out.

I had no conducting officer this time so I had to get the men's names and home towns from them as I was filming. We came across an abandoned camp with a rather dejected group of so-called guerrillas still there. I think that they thought that discretion was the better part of valour as they gave themselves up. Once again our intrepid cameraman was in the thick of the action. No, I didn't take the guerrillas' names or the town they came from. I left that to the officer in charge of the patrol.

Back at the camp I took a shower. I found out why the patrol had the bottom of their trousers bound up. Stripping off for my shower, I found two rather large leeches in my groin. They had had their fill of my blood and were about to fall off. Touching them, very carefully, with a lighted cigarette, they fell to the ground, taking my blood with them. Not that I had a lot to give away. I was well-prepared for my next trip into the jungle. I was bound up like an Egyptian mummy. No leech was going to get me that time.

I filmed as many men serving in Malaya as I could, but one patrol was much the same as another. I had run out of ideas after a couple of weeks, so I made my way back to Singapore.

I had kept my hotel room in Singapore while I was away and my clothes still hung in the wardrobe. When I got them out they were green with mildew, so high was the humidity. I had had enough of wearing jungle green, so off to the cleaners they went.

I was now short of cash so I cabled London for more to pay the hotel bill and make my way home. I didn't actually mention that last bit about coming home. I didn't want another one of those PSs in the reply, otherwise my family would really wonder where their wandering boy was tonight. Once the cash arrived, I paid the hotel bill and made my booking on the next flight to London. I sent my cable with my flight number and time of arrival on the same day that I left. That way there was no chance of another one of those cables.

By the time I returned to London, I had clocked up 25,000 miles in

my round trip. To my surprise, I was met by the BBC and asked to appear on a radio programme called *In Town Tonight*. Anyone much over the age of 40 will remember that programme. For younger readers, it was roughly the radio equivalent of the modern-day, early evening TV local news programme but, of course, in those days even radio was national and had no local stations.

The programme always started with the sound of London rush-hour traffic. As the background effect was faded, the BBC announcer said, 'Once again we stop the roar of London's traffic to bring you some of the famous people who are in town tonight.' On the programme that evening were Eva Bartok, Johnny Ray and John Pudney, famous people indeed. It was nice to be called famous. I've been called many things in my time but famous was one of the nicer ones.

6

PATHÉ DOCUMENTARY

It took me a few days to get back to normality. Now I was once again covering run-of-the-mill news stories. In my spare time, I was making out my expenses for the Korean trip. I had to account for every penny that was sent to me. In addition, I was entitled to deduct danger money while I was in Korea and Malaya at the rate of £10 a day. It doesn't sound like much now but in 1952 that £10 was roughly the average weekly income in England.

After a few days I had all my expenses ready and handed them in to the news room. A couple of days later, I was called up to Howard Thomas's office. There, laid out on his desk in a long row, were my expenses. 'This looks like trouble,' I thought. Gathering them all up, he handed them back to me. 'Surely you can do better than this,' he said. 'Try again and make them at least double!' It was a nice gesture and Howard Thomas's way of saying thank you. No, I did not retire and live in luxury – not after the tax man had taken his share.

My next big assignment was the Coronation. That event was one of the biggest newsreel stories for many a year. A great deal of planning had gone into the major operation of filming for newsreels and special colour features. The route sites had to be selected and we needed lighting tests in Westminster Abbey.

I was given the job of filming the actual crowning inside the Abbey. It was the most uncomfortable camera position I have ever been in. With just three feet of headroom, there was no chance to have a good stretch. The rehearsal lasted an hour and a half and was bad enough. For the actual ceremony, I had to sit there for eight hours! I thought that I would never stand up straight again.

Pathé's coverage of the Coronation was a great success. It had taken all their resources and cameramen to produce both black and white and colour versions. It made me think that it was about time for a change. I wanted to get away from being a one-man-band newsreel cameraman and get back to features and documentaries.

Like most newsreel cameramen in those days, I travelled the world operating on my own. I never knew where I might be going next or for

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how long. What was the saying? 'To the ends of the earth at a moment's notice.' Even at weekends there was always some sporting event or show. It was really a seven-days-a-week job, twenty-four-hours a day. It made you totally self-confident and taught me how to cope with most things in life. The only problem was that staying away from home for so much of the time was putting a great strain on the family. I was so involved, I failed to see the damage that was being done to my private life. The neighbours used to ask, 'Where's he going now? Timbuktu?'

In its day, the cinema newsreel had a big following. Before television matured, it was the only visual medium able to cover topical events throughout the world. It wasn't too political, it had a light approach to news, and always looked for the positive side of a story rather than the negative.

The newsreel companies had to cover the whole world but with very few cameramen. Pathé had six, plus two sound recordists and a number of freelance cameramen in other countries known as 'stringers'. Even though the reel was only ten minutes long, and there were only two issues each week, it was still a problem having to keep up with international events. A good editor was always on the look-out

for an exclusive, so he would be making full use of his staff cameramen. As a result, the stringers would be covering for more than one company.

We used lightweight cameras, sometimes only holding 100 feet of film which would give just over one minute of screen time. It allowed you to be very mobile to cover any story in any location. Although it could be a couple of days after the event before the film was seen in the cinema, that was no bad thing. The public would have read all about events in the daily press, probably with several different slants from several different reporters. Seeing it on the big screen had a much bigger impact because the film showed things as they actually were. You knew that the camera never lied!

Anyway, I was getting tired of being the Lone Ranger travelling the world in search of news stories. My health was a little suspect and I could already see that the days of the cinema newsreel were numbered. Television was killing it off and no-one was fighting to save it. I even thought of joining BBC News or ITN. But my first love was features or documentary films. So I asked to be transferred to the documentary department at Pathé.

One of my first assignments was the Queen's visit to Ghana, along with three other Pathé cameramen. Two were covering for the newsreel and two of us were filming in colour for a documentary. As I was assigned to the royal press party, I would be attending various evening functions, so I was advised to take a white evening jacket with me.

All went well for a couple of days. Then one night I was taken very ill with stomach trouble. This was an occasional affliction left over from the war when I was wounded at Cassino. I was in a pretty bad state by the morning. I thought that the best thing I could do was to get out with my camera and film the day's events. I ended up walking around in a daze trying to film the royal party at the dam on the river Volta. The Duke of Edinburgh came up to me and said, 'You look terrible. Are you allright?' I explained my condition and he replied, 'You should go back to the hotel and go to bed.'

Obeying the Royal Command, to bed I went.

In the morning, after another rough night, there was a knock on my bedroom door and in walked the Queen's doctor. He made a quick examination and saw the scar on my stomach from my war wounds. His advice was to go into hospital or fly home. With the help of my very good friend Pat Whitaker, who was covering the visit for the newsreel, I found myself on a plane bound for London.

Remember that white evening jacket I never got to wear in Ghana? It hung in my wardrobe for over 30 years. The first time I

wore it was at my grandson's wedding 33 years later. It still fitted perfectly!

After a few weeks' rest I had an examination by the firm's Harley Street specialist. He found little wrong with me but his advice was to take it easy. So maybe I had done the right thing by leaving the newsreel.

Working on various documentaries, it was good to be part of a crew again even if it wasn't a big one. There were two on camera, two on sound, an assistant director and a director. It was a crew like that which worked on a number of documentaries for the British Motor Corporation such as the development and making of the first Mini, the new Rover and many others.

The Central Office of Information (COI) was another source of sponsorship for many documentaries. One that came Pathé's way was *Morning on Mount Kenya*, an army training film. The unit flew out to Kenya and stayed at the Tree Tops Hotel at Nyeri. There were eight on the crew, plus six actors. The story was about an army patrol rescuing a crashed pilot on the top of Mount Kenya.

Most of the filming was done at around 10,000 feet, but to give some extra production value, it was decided that four of us would climb to the top to film at the snow line. That was at 17,000 feet. I had a word with the game warden about this climb. He told me to climb up in ordinary boots but to change at the top and come down in jungle boots. I was straight off to Nyeri to buy my jungle boots. They were the very last pair in the shop.

As we got near to the top, it was very tough going. The thin air makes it harder and harder to breathe. So, at 16,000 feet, we gave it best. The scenery took away what little breath you had left. Now for those jungle boots for the way down. The rest of the crew looked on in amazement as I washed my feet in the ice cold water. Out came the boots. The crew had the last laugh. I had been sold a micky. They were two left feet. Not to be outdone, on went those boots. I went down round and round in circles. I never did find out the reason for wearing them. I think that the game warden had the very last laugh.

Morning on Mount Kenya was a great success. It went out in the cinemas as a second feature. After that success, Pathé was given another army documentary training film called *Ambush*. It was to be filmed in Malaya, so it was back to the jungle for me.

There were six in the crew. All were freelance except yours truly, the only permanent Pathé staff man. There were six actors and the director was Mike Forlong. As the title implied, the film was about an army patrol being ambushed in the Malayan jungle. We flew out to

Singapore, then on to the Jungle Warfare School in Malaya, where we stayed in the officers' mess.

On the first night, Mike Forlong called us all together for a little chat. It was about how to behave in an officers' mess. This isn't on, I thought. So up I got to give them the benefit of a few remarks. The gist of my contribution was that I had come out here to make a film, not to be lectured on behaviour. One by one most of the unit joined me. It was a very bad start to the film. I know that I was in the wrong but it was one of those things. I was permanent staff. I had vast experience of filming including the whole of World War II, newsreels all over the world, and even documentary coverage of a royal tour. You couldn't tell me how to conduct myself in an officers' mess.

Things didn't improve. The director and I were at constant loggerheads, and messages were passed between us through the assistant director. But as time went on, there grew an understanding between us. Both accepted the other's professional ability. He was a tough New Zealander, I an old newsreel cameraman. Well, not so old.

Having had my previous taste of the jungle, I was well prepared for the leeches. My biggest problem was filming in the thick jungle. There was so little light getting through the canopy to the artists that, on one occasion, the assistant director offered to climb a rather large tree to take off some of the top branches to let more light in. It was just bad luck that a line of soldier ants was also using that tree about half-way up. They went straight up his trouser leg, through his clothes and emerged at the nape of his neck. On the way they paused to bite him in the most tender of places. From that day to this, I've never seen anyone come down a tree so fast. He ripped all his clothes off to get rid of those ants. The problem was that this left him fair game for the leeches.

Despite all the trials and tribulations, in the end we were left with a good film on our hands, a director and cameraman who were now the best of mates, and an assistant director who would never climb a tree again!

After the success of *Morning on Mount Kenya* and *Ambush*, Pathé ventured into features with a film called *Stop Over For Ever*. It was to be filmed on location in Taormina, Sicily. This was much against the wishes of the parent Company, Associated British Picture Corporation. They were based at Elstree and that's where all major pictures were made. However, with far lower overheads shooting the whole film on location, Pathé could cut the production costs by half. Being part of the corporation, they were, of course, guaranteed a distribution in all ABC cinemas.

This was to be my first feature and also the first time that I would

not be the man actually behind the camera operating it. With a camera crew of four, I was the director of photography. Apart from myself, there was an operator, first assistant and second assistant (or clapper boy). The only chance I got to look through the camera was to check the set up or my lighting. I was quite lost for a time. I've always said that the closest person to the production is the camera operator.

The whole unit was some 20 strong, with the electricians coming down from Rome. *Stop Over For Ever* gave me the chance to show my skills as a lighting cameraman, with some interiors in our hotel plus other in shops and restaurants in the town. But the big lighting location was the main square in Taormina at night. Those electricians from Rome were amazing. No matter where I asked for a lamp, there it would go. We had no generator. They picked up the supply from overhead cables. I was in my element. I always hoped for an Oscar one day. I thought that I could do whatever my old mate from Pinewood, Freddie Francis could do, and he won two Oscars. Or was it three?

Now, it was at Taormina that I was wounded for the second time during the war. I told the dramatic story to most of the unit and offered to show them the very spot. The bridge had, of course, been

blown up, which is why I was there with the Sappers when it happened. But I expected to find that milestone where I had sat with blood pouring from my wound. Alas, the remnants of the bridge must have been cleared away and I couldn't find any milestone. So I had told the story, but did they believe me?

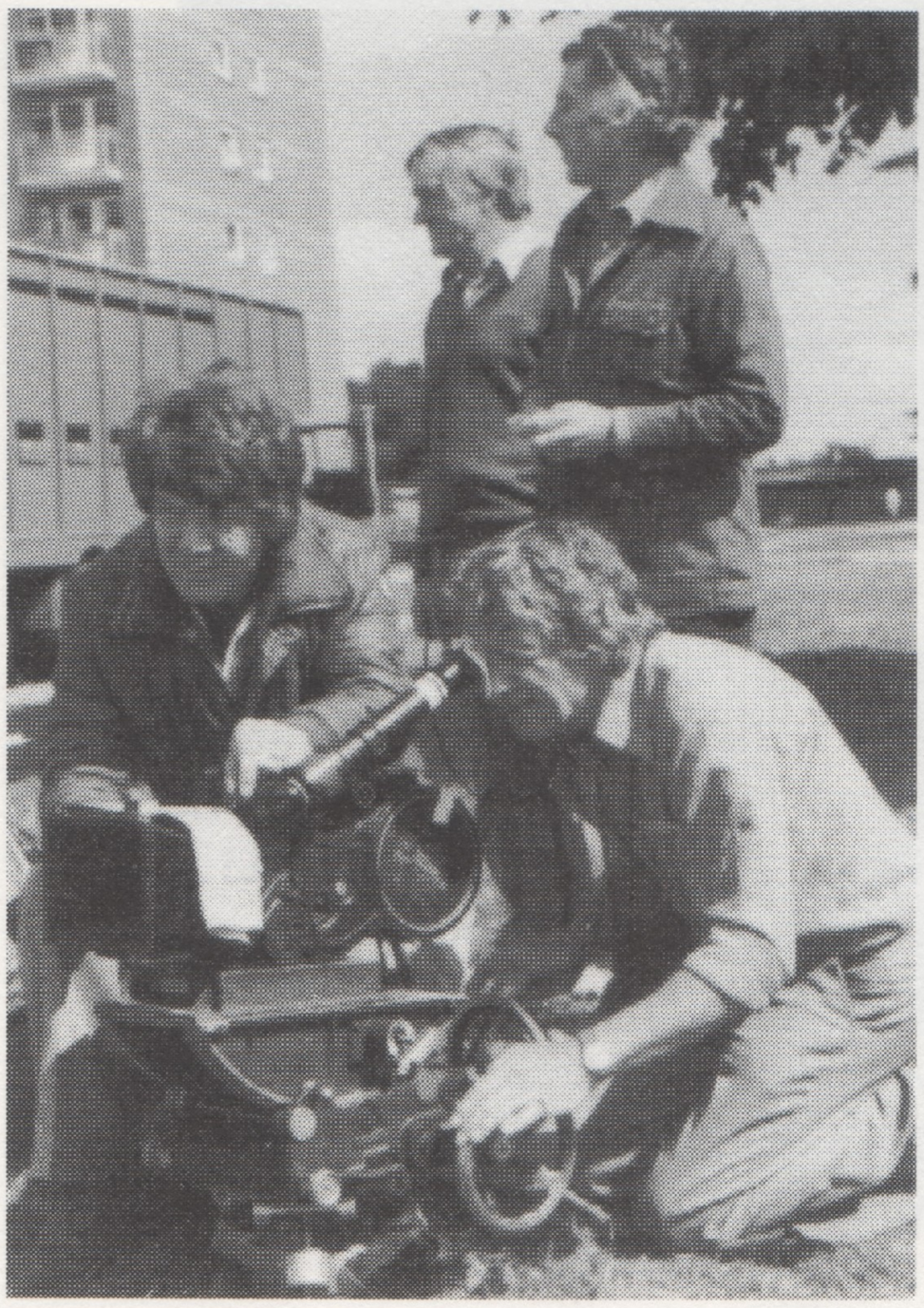
7

CHILDREN'S FILMS

The Children's Film Foundation was set up and financed by the film industry to encourage the young to become the cinema-going public of the future. It made children's serial films to show at the Saturday morning pictures. Pathé found that they could cut the costs of their features even more by making them back to back with a children's film.

The way it worked was that the crew would go on location to make a children's film. That would be financed by the Foundation, including all the air fares and the all-in deal with the crew. That same crew would then stay on to make a feature film.

Malta was the location for the first of these ventures. It was a children's film called *Davy Jones's Locker* with Susan George, who was about 16 at the time. The feature was *Death is a Woman*. Both



films were shot mainly underwater. The actual location was a little island called Comino and its one and only hotel. In fact the hotel was its one and only building. I believe that it did once have an asylum, so it was an ideal location for a film crew! It had no roads, so no cars, and the only way there was by ferry from the main island of Malta.

It was the first time that most of the actors on both films had experienced underwater filming. With an ex-naval diver, Tony Watham, as instructor and safety man, all went well. It was an ambitious project to take on, but you have to remember that the cinema needed low-budget features and children's Saturday films if it were to stand any chance against television.

Now, I am a very bad swimmer and therefore no lover of the sea. So Neddy Haliday got the job of underwater cameraman for both films. I did try it once. I dived off the side of the boat with all the equipment on. Unfortunately, instead of going in backwards, I just made one big dive into the water and ended up with the Aqua-lung around my head. It took four of the crew to fish me out in a mad panic. No, I'll leave underwater filming to the experts.

The second of these films was in Morocco. We started off in Marrakesh, then crossed the Atlas Mountains down to Zagora on the edge of the Sahara Desert. The approach was much the same as before. We made the children's film first, then the feature. Terence Demarney was one of the leading actors in *Hand of Night*, the feature film. The weather was very hot in the desert and Terence used to carry a bottle of water in his pocket. Well, we thought that it was water. We could never understand why his concentration went as the day wore on. We eventually found out why. His bottle of water was laced with gin. Dear old Terence. He was a great actor.

Hand of Night was, in my opinion, the best feature that Pathé made. It had some very good special effects and by far the best that I had produced on a film. Alas, it was the last Pathé made. Elstree Studios put the pressure on. All feature films made by Associated British Picture Corporation, which included Pathé, should be made at Elstree.

The Children's Film Foundation was still going but most of the

films were now made by independent producers. Pathé lost interest once they were prevented from making features alongside the children's film. Associated British Pathé now had their sights set on television.

8

ABC TELEVISION

It was only a matter of time before Associated British got into TV. Howard Thomas left Pathé to set up ABC Television at Teddington Studios. It was later to become Thames Television. A lot of their early programmes came Pathé's way.

Tempo, a kind of weekly chat show interviewing various personalities, was one. Another, this time more ambitious, was *Journey of a Lifetime*, to be shot in the Holy Land. The first series was a half-hearted affair shot in Israel. It was before the six-day war, so most of the holy places were still in Jordan. Only a small crew went, no sound and no artists, just a cameraman and director. It deserved better. The second series was shot in Jordan. The reason for there being two separate series was that, at that time, you couldn't cross over from one country to the other. That second series had a full crew plus two actors, Ann Lawson and John Bonney. There were four on camera, two on sound, three on production and one electrician. The Bible was the script and the two actors took you through the various holy places.

Looking back now, it is obvious that even that second series in Jordan was badly planned. As cameraman on the series, I was given little chance to produce a first-class photographic result with the scant equipment at my disposal. I had no big arc lamps to lower the contrast of the deep shadows cast by the bright sunlight which, at that latitude, is directly overhead. The artists had little or no detail in their faces. What little lighting I did have wouldn't have lit a black cat in a coal cellar. In fact, I was reduced to borrowing white sheets from the hotel to act as reflectors. I laid them on the ground for the actors to walk on to try to reflect some of that bright sunlight into the shadows on their faces. At one interior location, the Church of Nativity, I had extra lights sent down from Beirut. I was fighting a losing battle. I don't know if it was lack of money or bad planning.

We were a unit of 15 and we made our base at Ramallah, taking over the Grand Hotel. After a day's work filming in the various holy places, it was interesting to hear the conversation between members of the unit at the hotel bar. It was all about religion and the stories which

had taken place at those actual sites. With so little evidence of what might have been in Christ's day, was the story we were telling true? Not being a devout Christian, the more I saw, the more doubt crept into my mind. Christianity had become so commercialised. At so many sites we filmed, so many things had been added to make for realism that it just didn't ring true. I accepted that after 2,000 years, there wouldn't be much of the original location left. Maybe it would be better just to leave it to the imagination.

The Church of the Nativity was one of the main sites. We had permission to film the interior but it had to be at night as there would be so many tourists there during the day. With the extra lights from Beirut, I was able to light the main body of the church. Then we moved down to the crypt. It was a small area but it took some time to light and organise. After a rehearsal with the artists, we were ready to film. Before the camera could turn, however, a priest walked through the crypt with an incense burner filling the place with smoke. We gave it time to clear and, after one more rehearsal and a few minor adjustments, we were once more ready to film. But before the camera could turn again, our friend was back again with his incense and more smoke. The assistant director was sent off post-haste to see what he could do. A little something in the collection box did the trick. No more smoke.

Our filming took us to most of the holy places: Jericho, Nablus, Nazareth, Beersheba, Hebron, Bethlehem and Jerusalem. I crossed the River Jordan and swam in the Dead Sea. Our last location was Petra, another place revisited.

After four months, it was back home again with many thoughts and questions asked about the stories in the Bible.

I returned to Jerusalem some time later to work on another series for ABC Television called *In Search Of Saint Paul*. We had equipped a Commer van with camera mounts front and rear. The windscreen and rear door were removable so that we could do tracking shots through various towns and villages unobserved. That van carried the crew and all the camera equipment for some 15,000 miles through Jordan, Syria, Turkey and Greece.

Michael Aldridge was the one actor we had, and the camera being mounted inside the vehicle made us inconspicuous when filming him walking through the towns and villages.

Our vehicle really came into its own in Damascus where we were able to track down a street called 'Straight'. It was a long, covered way full of shops and people. It had great local colour and bursts of sunlight came through holes in the roof and mixed with the dark shadows. Michael fought through the crowd with the vehicle

following. We got a report back from London on the rushes. It said: 'Tell Billy to check his exposure meter. The light is going up and down.'

It was on the road to Damascus that we had our first bit of trouble. We were doing one of our famous tracking shots. It was a close-up of Michael's feet just walking along the road. It was a shot we could have taken anywhere.

We were suddenly surrounded by Syrian troops. Of all the places we could have chosen to do our tracking shot, we had to pick the road outside a Syrian army establishment. They took over the vehicle and drove us all into the army camp. Their first thought was that we were Israeli spies. After a long discussion, a general showing of passports and a letter of permission from the government, all was well. It was mint tea all round, and then we were on our way.

We covered many a mile through towns and villages: Damascus, Antalya, Izmir, Kusadasi, Istanbul, Thessaloniki and Athens. It got a bit primitive at times. Poor Michael was down to eating nothing but boiled rice. Some of the loos left a lot to be desired, too. You know the ones: just a hole in the ground with two places to put your feet and a can of water to wash yourself with. No toilet rolls anywhere. But I'm getting back on to my favourite subject: loos throughout the world.

It was this situation that prompted the assistant director to go and buy a box of toilet rolls as part of the unit's equipment. Now, we did occasionally stay at some nice hotels and one of these was in Istanbul. Arriving at this four-star hotel, we started to unload the camera equipment and luggage. The job was soon taken over by the hotel porters. Each item was taken in and our box of toilet rolls was the last one. It was placed in the middle of the foyer for all to see. A rather embarrassed assistant director picked it up and took it to his room.

Another problem was laundry. At the same hotel, we arranged to send it, as it was some time since we had had the chance to get it done. We made up our own bundles, clearly marked with our room numbers. I think that the assistant director must have made a deal for a job lot. It all came back in one big bundle. There it was, all over the assistant director's bed. There was a big argument as to which underpants, etc., belonged to whom. I never did get my own back. The ones I got must have been the assistant director's. They were pale blue with red roses. No self-respecting cameraman would have been seen dead in them.

It had taken us six weeks to cover those 15,000 miles and shoot a few thousand feet of film. It was one of the nicest projects I had ever worked on. It was a great unit with everyone taking the good, the bad,

the boiled rice and the toilet rolls all in their stride.

I had tried my hand at most things to do with filming, but puppets were to widen that experience further. One of my claims to fame is that I was the cameraman on *Torchy*.

Torchy was one of the Andersons' early puppet series for television. The Andersons were, of course, later to find fame with *Thunderbirds*. *Torchy* involved very basic puppetry. The puppeteers operated from a gantry above the set with strings operating the puppets below. It all took place in the basement of a building in Berwick Street in London. There were no clever electronics, just strings. How hard I tried to light them out. We only did one series before they moved on to bigger things.

Pathé was still making documentary films for the Rover car company and one of the last was about the Range Rover. Having filmed the development and the factory, it was decided to take two of the cars across the Sahara Desert. With the help of Mini Track, who had done many such trips before, two Range Rovers and two Land Rovers were flown out to Algiers. With a camera crew of three, no sound, four personnel from Rover and four from Mini Track, we set off to cross the Sahara.

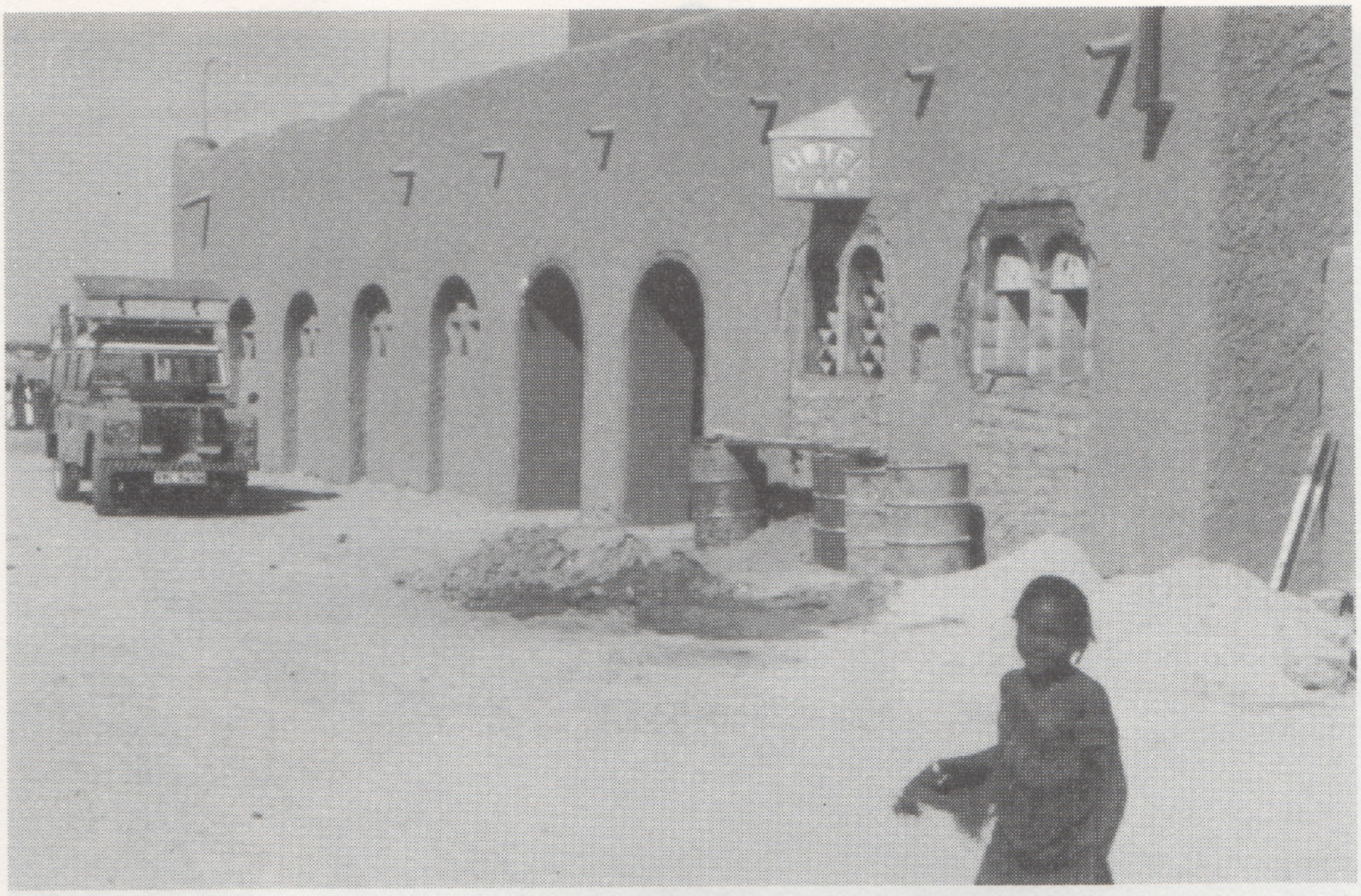
We were gripped by a spirit of adventure and sense of pioneering as we drove those Range Rovers through *wadis* and over sand dunes where no other vehicle had ever been before. We filmed in the most difficult places and were well into the desert with nothing but miles

and miles of sand in every direction when, one day, we spotted something in the distance. As we got closer, we thought that we could make out a motor coach which appeared to be towing a trailer. It turned out to be a 32-seater full of German tourists, and the trailer was their sleeping compartment. Bang went our spirit of adventure. We might as well have been driving down the M1.

We did finish the trip covering 1,500 miles in about three weeks,

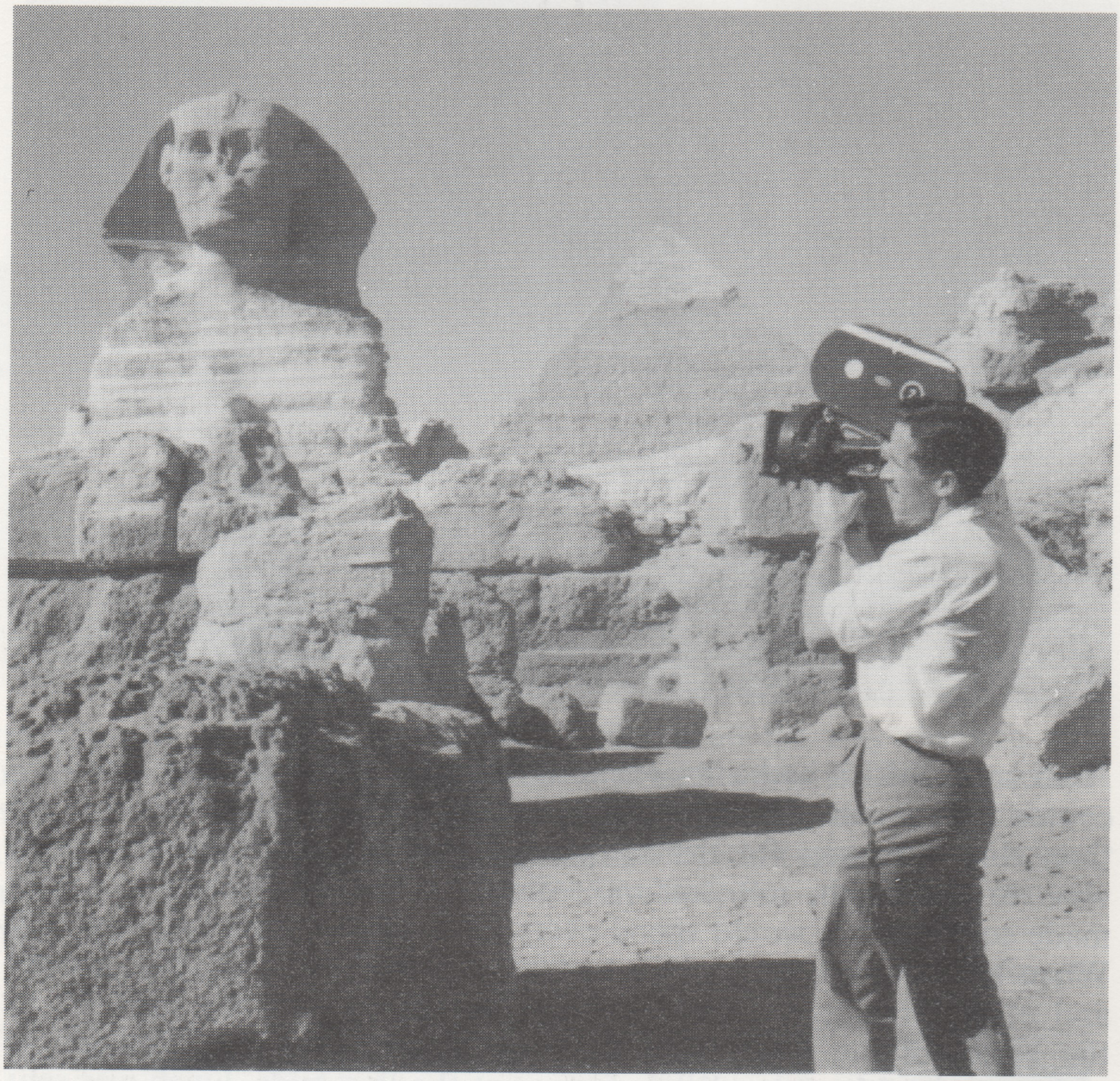
travelling from Algiers to Niger. We filmed all the way sleeping out under the stars at night. Apart from one night, that is. We spent that night at what claimed to be the Hotel Lair at Niger. It was little more than a mud hut. The motoring organisations didn't appear to have got around to giving it a star rating. If they had, I'm sure that it would have been a negative quantity!

Before leaving Pathé, my last filming location saw me back in Egypt.



Associated British had a lot of money tied up in the country and they couldn't get it out. To make use of it, they said that they would make three documentaries for the Egyptian government. The three subjects were to be health, tourism and education. The Egyptians certainly made sure that we would spend every penny. No expense was spared. When we travelled up the Nile to film at Luxor, Karnak, Abu Simbel and other temples, we used ex-King Farouk's yacht. We went on to the Valley of the Kings, Tutankhamun's tomb and the Pyramids in two very nice Mercedes. While filming at the Pyramids, lunch was sent out from our hotel. It was a spread the like of which I have never seen before or since. What added the real touch of luxury was that it not only came accompanied by copious amounts of wine, but there were also two waiters to serve it. They were certainly out to spend all that money.

When we got home, things had gone very quiet. It seemed to me that the writing was on the wall, and I was sure that Pathé was about to close. A number of top people had already left to work in television. Howard Thomas himself, Paul Fox and others from the cutting room and sound department had departed in quick succession. So when an independent producer named Jack Howels offered me a film as cameraman on a documentary for the Gas Council, I handed in my notice. Little did I know that if I had stayed another six months, I would have collected some £5,000 pounds in redundancy money for my 20-odd years service!



I have no regrets. That documentary on natural gas made a good start to my career as a freelance cameraman. It took me out to the rigs in the North Sea which I found rather pleasant. The accommodation was good and the food was excellent. The problem was that it was only a two-week shoot, so I was soon looking around for more work.

9

FREELANCE

A production manager with whom I had worked in the past asked me if I was interested in working on a feature in the West Indies. The cameraman had already been engaged so the offer was only as operator. Now, I had been told never to turn a job down as a freelance. It's amazing how fast news travels and you soon get the reputation of being a bit choosy about which films you work on. It may only have been a job as operator, but a feature in the West Indies – who could say no? So off I went to Port of Spain, Trinidad, as the operator on a film called *The Right and the Wrong*.

The producer/director was an Indian who had experience of filming in Bombay. The film was a little controversial in its subject matter, which was about black against white, but it wasn't too strong. It wasn't the film that upset me so much as the cameraman. He was an Englishman who had settled in the West Indies. By a coincidence, he had worked as a stills man at Associated British Studios, Elstree. We just did not hit it off! To me, he did not seem to have had much experience as a lighting cameraman. I decided that I ought to help him, so on many occasions I would question the way he was working. He seemed to get the idea that I was after his job as cameraman. It didn't go down well and it didn't go unnoticed by the director.

Although it wasn't a very happy location for me, in the end I was approached by the producer, whose name was Micky Kumar. He asked if I would like to come out again and direct the next film. He gave me a story he had written, and asked me to break it down into a shooting script. He also asked whether I could get him a back-up camera, which he would pay for, when I was back in England.

I had my doubts about coming back. Although I was accepted by all and sundry, including the local population, I felt a tension in the air. There was nothing I could put my finger on, but there was a continuous undercurrent. You had to be careful what you said, what you did and where you went.

Back in England, Pathé were disposing of all their equipment, so what better place to go for Micky Kumar's camera. They all but gave

it to me. Although I had to pay something because it had to go through the accounts department, for a paltry sum I had a camera worth ten times as much.

I shipped it out with the shooting script on which I had worked for many an hour. It was the last I ever heard of the camera or the script. Rumour had it that my not-very-good-friend the cameraman ended up with the camera. It is true that Micky Kumar had paid for it, but what a bargain. A couple of letters brought no reply and I could not see any sense in going out there. I doubt if I would have got any satisfaction. So I had learned another lesson. You're on your own in the freelance world.

The children's films were still being made, and one took me to Innsbruck in Austria. It was being made by an independent company and was called *Avalanche*. It was about some children being trapped in an avalanche. We spent all our time in deep snow on the mountain side. It certainly made a change from the warm sunshine of the West Indies!

To put some realism into the film, it was decided to try and film an actual avalanche. Our mountain guide said that he could start one from the mountain top. So with the camera in a safe position on the other side of the valley, our guide appeared on the peak opposite. How he got there I don't know but he started to walk the snow down the mountain with his skis. We soon had a good avalanche going and it made great pictures. I think he had done it before. To keep the

realism going, we found an old avalanche area to film the rescue scenes. We carried on filming with two guides keeping look-out. All of a sudden there was a roar from the mountain top. Both our look-outs were gone in a flash, closely followed by the rest of the unit.

The continuity girl fell flat on her face in the snow and the director, who was hard on her heels, couldn't stop and ran right over her. After all the panic had died down, we discovered that it was just an aircraft passing overhead. Maybe it sounded like an avalanche. Our two guides obviously thought so.

I was getting around to various production companies making contacts and generally getting myself known as a freelance. I worked on a number of commercials for a day here, a day there. The pay was very good but it was a bit of a rat race. It was not so much what you knew as who you knew and what kind of a deal you could do. The production companies used to have put their costs together from three or four different sources. So I bought my own camera and lights because it gave me an edge by being able to quote one price for all the equipment and crew.

Some of the best commercials that came my way were ones for the Navy. The locations were New York, Puerto Rico, the Bahamas, Gibraltar, Malta and Cyprus. Join the Navy and see the world? The crew on those commercials certainly did. At the other end of the scale

there were the jobs for the *Daily Mirror*: the odd one day in Manchester, Birmingham or Scunthorpe. Still, it was all work.

I was shortly to find myself back in the North Sea a couple of times. The first time was working for Michael Forlong Productions on a documentary for Mobil Oil. Michael had set up his own production company at Shepperton Studios and, after Malaya, we had become good friends. The documentary was about building a new oil rig called 'Beryl B'. There was a two-week stay on the rig and I found the food and accommodation first class. When we returned from the North Sea, we went on to America to interview the head of Mobil. His wife's name just happened to be Beryl. She must have been 'Beryl A'!

Yet again it was back to the North Sea, this time for Shell. It was the first time I had worked for the Shell Film Unit, who were well known for their excellent documentaries. This film was all about life and working conditions on an oil rig. It turned out to be an introduction to the Shell Unit and subsequent work on other films for them. There was *Safety Net*, an excellent documentary about safety at an oil refinery. Then there was a trip to the Arctic Circle, Sweden, Norway, Finland and Lapland. I thought that I might have a chance of meeting you-know-who, if not in person, then maybe one of his reindeers.

I had joined the unit at Lyon in France, replacing a cameraman who was leaving after a disagreement with the director. We filmed in various factories in France before flying to Helsinki and then on to Rovaniem near the Arctic Circle.

The film set out to cover the wide distribution of Shell products in the most inaccessible places. Although we had been provided with

warm clothing for the Arctic, the director thought that he needed that little bit extra. In fact he had so much on, he looked like a great big bundle of clothing with a head sticking out of the top. Every time he fell over, someone had to pick him up. And was it cold! It was 20 below zero at Rovaniem. When we were filming at the airport at night, it was so cold the electric cables were frozen like rods of iron. One of the last shots before we left Helsinki was of an ice breaker in the Baltic Sea. Before I would fly off in a helicopter, I insisted on some warm head-gear. The assistant director brought me one of those fur hats with the big ear-flaps. So off I went with my camera to the Baltic Sea. We found our ice breaker, a Russian one, and the helicopter landed on the ice and I got out to get my shot. We were about a mile in front of the ship, which was coming towards me. I was no longer the man I once had been. I had grown wiser with age so I put a long focus lens on the camera to foreshorten the distance. That way, I got a very nice close-up before the ice breaker got too close. None of the daredevil stuff of old!

Having taken off from the ice and given our Russian friends a wave goodbye, we flew straight to Helsinki Airport where the plane for London was waiting on the tarmac. We had left it a bit late and the rest of the unit was already on board. The helicopter landed by the side of the plane and out I jumped, fancy fur hat, camera and all. As I went on board I think that the rest of the passengers thought that I was some VIP.

My first love was aerial photography, whether it was flying in helicopters or fixed wing aircraft. Filming from helicopters, you usually had a 'Tyler Mount' for the camera. One of the problems was that a lot of the helicopter-borne jobs were for the services, and their machines had no facility for a Tyler Mount. So when I was working on a safety film for the RAF, I had made up a mount of my own which I could hook onto the winch of any service helicopter.

It was a very simple rig. Just a flat platform where the camera was mounted on two handles. There were switches to operate the camera and the zoom lens, and bungees going up to a central point that I hooked on to the winch. In other words it was a sort of poor man's Tyler Mount, and it may sound a bit 'Heath Robinson' but it worked very well.

I used that mount on many occasions. One such time was on an army film called *The Battle of the Bulge*. The shot in question was to

show the distance the Germans covered on their push towards Antwerp in the last war. It was a very cold day. So cold in fact that the sergeant pilot had to knock the ice off the rotor blades before we could take off. We took off with me sitting at the open door, wearing a safety harness, and with my camera hooked on to the winch. Flying reasonably low, we approached some overhead cables. Over the intercom I heard the pilot say 'Shall we go over or under?' Not being sure what he was on about, I said: 'Under'. No way could we have got under those cables! At the last moment he aborted. I came back from that trip a frozen nervous wreck.

Another great shot I got with my rig was one of the *Ark Royal*, for a naval commercial. We flew the helicopter at sea level and held it there until the last moment. Then we lifted straight up as the ship passed underneath. If we had gone too soon, we would have had no shot. If we had left it too late we would have had no helicopter, pilot or cameraman.

Flying in fixed-wing aircraft was a different matter. In a two-seater fighter you were strapped in with very little room, a hand-held camera and limited movement. It was very difficult to cover any manoeuvre because of the 'G' force. Such was the case in a training film for the RAF.

The film was called *Air to Air Refuelling*. I flew in all the RAF two-seater fighter aircraft – Hunter, Tornado, Harrier, Lightning and Buccaneer – plus a V-Bomber and a Nimrod. In the two-seater aircraft, I sat behind the pilot so as to film his eye-line as he approached the tanker aircraft to refuel. In each case we went through various manoeuvres showing the right and the wrong ways to do it. Each pilot did the same thing and I became an expert on refuelling in the air. The only trouble is that I can't fly anything, not even a kite.

To be allowed to fly in all those aircraft, I had to pass the same medical as a fighter pilot. I also had to go through various tests such as breathing oxygen under pressure, and a spell in the decompression chamber. To my amazement I came through without any trouble. Fitted with my own flying suit and helmet, I did all the airborne filming on that film. It must have amounted to many hours, the climax to which was the flight in the Lightning. First of all we missed our rendezvous with the tanker and had to abort and land to refuel. On the second attempt, we made contact and completed our mission. Returning to base the pilot flew at maximum speed and I thought that the aircraft was going to disintegrate. After landing, we were walking to the debriefing room when the pilot said, 'You are now a member of the thousand-mile-an-hour club.' We had just flown home at over 1,000 miles an hour.

To complete the shooting on the film, I had to fly in a Nimrod to get air-to-air shots of the tanker with the fighter in the process of refuelling. We made our rendezvous at 30,000 feet. I started to film through an observation window when it started to ice up. When I reported this back to the pilot, the reply came back to put on oxygen masks. He then decompressed the aircraft and one of the crew opened the observation window. It was the last thing I thought would happen, but the clarity of the air was amazing and the pictures were breath-taking.

One bit of filming in a two-seater aircraft that didn't prove successful was with Bill Bedford flying in a Hunter. It was to have been the background for the title sequence of a film called *Come to Britain*. The shot was flying low over the North Sea approaching the white cliffs of Dover, then up and over the cliffs to show the country-side beyond. It just didn't work. My position in the aircraft was all wrong and I couldn't look down enough as we went over the cliffs. All I got in my camera was blue sky.

Another one of my complete failures involved sending a camera up ten miles into space. Bristol University were sending a balloon up with various instruments to record information about the weather. I was covering the story and first made contact on a 'recce'. At ten miles up,

a parachute would be released and the instruments would return to earth. I thought that it would be a good idea if I could send up a small 35mm camera with a timing device to switch it on at ten miles up. If the weather was clear and fine, it would be a great shot of the earth from that height. Then the camera could return to earth with its own parachute.

Sid Randell, a camera mechanic I had known at Pathé, put the camera in a box wrapped in thermal wool to keep out the cold. With a timer and switch to run the camera and release the parachute, it was a masterpiece of modern technology. I returned to Bristol University to film the event. My last shot was of the balloon disappearing into a clear blue sky with the camera attached. It was the last I ever saw of that camera. I bet those little green men in outer space have it filming for the Martian News.

To add to my list of failures was a film with Ann Todd. It was a documentary shot in Jordan called *Thunder is Silence*. Ann Todd was directing not acting, and it was part-financed by the Jordanian Government. Unfortunately it was short-crewed and under-budgeted. I found myself acting as cameraman and general dogsbody as there was no assistant director. The crew consisted of Ann Todd directing, one sound man, one camera assistant and myself as cameraman plus the other jobs.

How did I come to be on the film? The producer was an old friend from my Pathé days and the assistant producer was an old newsreel cameraman. It was their own production company and they were cutting too many corners. I felt that I was being used just to save a penny or two. Trying to do two jobs didn't work. My camera work suffered and I know that I turned in a poor result. One now-familiar location was Petra. This was my third visit and it had changed a lot since the last one. They had built a new hotel at the entrance to the passageway I had filmed and it had lost its feel of walking into the unknown. I was also sure that vehicles had been driven through because the walls were covered in white dust. The shot coming out of the darkness into the bright sunlight and towards the wonderful treasury building just didn't work this time.

We had two Arab drivers and a 'Mr Fixit' Arab contact man. On our last day of filming, he came up to me and asked if I had any money left. He had come to the conclusion right from the start that I was the man with the money. True to the Arab tradition, he asked about *baksheesh* for the drivers. Without further ado, I handed over all I had left. He gave a great big smile and, with a handshake, he was off. I hope those drivers got their fair share.

Before leaving Jordan, we had an audience with the king and were

each presented with a gold watch. Each, that is, apart from the camera assistant, who somehow got left out. Every job I worked on with him after that, he made a point of asking me the time!

Although I was not at the top of Ann Todd's list of favourite cameramen, as she was none too pleased with my work on *Thunder is Silence*, like Mr Fixit I had my *baksheesh* in the form of that gold watch from the king.

In my early days in the film industry, 16mm film was very much for the amateur. Now the film stock had improved beyond all recognition with much finer grain and much higher resolution. It was now a professional gauge used in television. The camera equipment had also improved. It was no longer the Kodak Special which everyone used, but the German and French 'Arriflex' and 'Eclair'. The latter was the camera I had and I was able to offer my services as cameraman with camera and lights on most documentaries and TV commercials. So I was using my 16mm camera more and more.

The crew you were working with was just as important as the equipment. Such was the variety of work and locations that you could be staying anywhere from a five-star hotel in New York to a mud hut in Niger on the edge of the Sahara. Your assistant needed not only to be a good technician and be able to take the rough with the smooth but also, above all, to have a good sense of humour.

As a freelance, your camera assistant was your right arm. But he would also be a freelance working with a number of other cameramen, so keeping the same assistant was always difficult. I had two or three favourites so, when I had fixed a date for a film, it was a question of ringing around to Sid, George or Vic to see who was free.

One of the tough documentaries was in Norway at the Outward Bound School. It involved filming in white water, deep snow on the mountain and up on the glacier. It was silent coverage because the commentary was to be added later. As a result, there was a crew of only three: the director, the camera assistant and me as the cameraman. Staying at that Outward Bound School was the sort of tough going where a good camera assistant came into his own.

We had a small underwater camera with us as part of our equipment. I had made up a sleeve which fitted over the front of a canoe and on which the camera was mounted facing back to look at the canoeist. The canoeist went down the white water and turned over before righting himself. With the camera switched on and running all the while, it made a great shot both above and under the water.

Filming up on the glacier, I abseiled down a 60-foot crevasse. That was where my small ACL camera proved to be invaluable because, even with a 200 foot magazine attached, it was small enough to hang

round my neck. Once down there filming the others making the descent, my one thought was that I hoped that I could make it back to the top. It was a tough two weeks' location but one that was satisfying because of the results we achieved. The great satisfaction of my job as a cameraman was to come back from a location like that in Norway, sit in the theatre with the film I had taken showing, and say to myself, 'I did that.'

My next film took me to Costa Rica, Cyprus and Germany. It was for a little known section of the BBC called 'English by Television' which made programmes for foreign students learning English. The film we made in those three countries was called *Bid for Power*. It was part of a series called *Follow Through* and was about a third world country discovering that it had rich deposits of silicon.

For background material, Costa Rica was chosen as the poor arid country. I think that someone either stuck a pin in the map or just decided that they would go to Costa Rica because they had never been there and fancied the trip. Whatever the truth of the matter, about 80% of Costa Rica consists of rain forest!

It was a very small unit of director, camera assistant and myself as cameraman who went there. We stayed in San José, the capital, filming the poor areas and shanty towns. Not surprisingly, we just could not find any dry arid areas in the middle of the rain forest. We were only there for a few days and, for all our efforts, only one shot was used in the final film.

Cyprus was the main location for the filming and we took over the Larnaca Town Hall for the interiors. It was a big unit, 20 or more-strong, including actors and electricians. It was more like the numbers you would have expected to find on a feature film. That location made up for all the bad ones. We stayed in a five-star hotel on the seafront and relaxed in the pool or in the bar after the day's work. On the odd day off, we would sunbathe by the pool. It was a shame to take the money but after three weeks of that hardship, we went on to Germany to film in a factory making solar panels. The other location for the series resulted in two weeks in Brighton. It was by the sea and close enough to be able to travel back and forth from home on a daily basis. It made quite a change from spending half my working life away from home in some far distant land.

10

SAUDI ARABIA

I had thought that my newsreel days as a one-man-band were long gone. It seems that I thought wrong. A cameraman friend had been working in Saudi Arabia and asked me if I would be interested in going there to work on the second unit, filming the building of the new airport at Jeddah. It turned out that the second unit was just me. So, armed with a Saudi visa and a work permit, I and my camera were off on our travels once again.

It was just a short visit of two weeks. The company, Transworld Publicity, was making a documentary on the building of the new airport and I was working on my own for extra coverage. Transworld had a nice set-up in Riyadh. There was a small studio with offices and accommodation for its foreign workers. Some of the technicians working in the publicity department were from England, while others were from all parts of the world. It proved to be an introduction for more work in the future because Transworld had an agent in London. His job was not only to engage people to work in Saudi, but in England as well. Through him, I got a number of two-man crew jobs around the country.

My next trip to Saudi will stay in my memory for ever. I had heard through the grapevine that my friend had given up working in Saudi, so I wasn't surprised to get a call from Transworld's agent, Geoffrey Morgan.

'Billy,' he said, 'how about a trip to Saudi for a few weeks?'

'What about money?' I said. That was the first thing that came into my head as I hadn't been doing too well lately.

'Five hundred,' came the reply.

'Come off it, Geoffrey,' I said. 'I can get that in England.'

'That's all, Billy.' he replied. 'It's not the gold mine it used to be.'

I was so short of cash that that Thursday morning found me at the Saudi Embassy waiting for a visa. In the past that had taken days, now it took just a few minutes. Someone had pulled a few strings. Then it was off to the hospital for a jab or two and back home – yes, I did have one – to pack a case and get my camera equipment ready for

the flight out the very next day. The reason for the rush was that my friend had already left Transworld and I was needed urgently to take his place.

Travelling with film equipment is always a bind and with a total of six cases the charge for the excess baggage on that occasion was almost as much as the original passenger ticket. Once through customs, it was the usual dreary wait for take-off. However, I did have a travelling companion. He was an editor employed by Transworld, named Zacky. Zacky was an Egyptian who spoke little English. I was, of course, the typical Brit through and through. I've travelled the world and am a great linguist. That is to say that I knew six words of Italian, four of French and about twelve in Arabic. The latter, which had been picked up during my two years in the Western Desert, probably appeared in no dictionary and would only be used reluctantly under great stress!

Seated in the rear of a Saudi 747, bound for Riyadh some eight hours' flying time away and with some time until scheduled take-off at twenty to four, I had time to think about what I had let myself in for. My recollection of Saudi was not a happy one. I remembered it as hot, dusty and with strange food. A tough place to work in. The in-flight film was *A Step to the Brink* which I thought was quite appropriate. I fell asleep half-way through. I can't stand those head sets; they hurt my ears. I picked my way through the ready-packed, take-it-or-leave-it, meal of chicken and chips, jelly and cream followed by coffee.

We touched down at ten minutes past midnight in Riyadh, local time, and I was soon reminded how hot it could be there as I stepped off the plane. There was a slow walk to the terminal building to be greeted by the Transworld production manager, another Egyptian. His name was quite unpronounceable so I called him Sid. A good old English name that slipped off my tongue with ease.

Having got through customs, I found myself in a rather battered old mini-bus bound for the Transworld Studios in Riyadh. The conversation between my two Egyptian friends was non-stop and punctuated by the words 'London' and 'Soho'. I gathered that my travelling companion had had a good time in London.

Geoffrey Morgan had told me that I would be staying in one of the company's 'villas'. He had a wonderful sense of humour. I know that I was not in a very happy state of mind, as it was late at night and I had just travelled thousands of miles. But the little old flat to which I was conducted in the heart of Riyadh was no villa. To top it all, Sid, the production manager, left me with the casual remark that he would pick me up at six in the morning, as we had to fly to Jeddah to film the opening of the new airport by the king. That left me

with only three hours to sleep. However, with a nod and smile, Sid was gone.

I was asleep most of the way on the flight to Jeddah so I can't describe the details. However, before the flight it was the usual security check: luggage, hand baggage and a walk through the metal detector arch. I always make those things buzz. It must be all the shrapnel left in me from the last war. So, it was a frisking job. Ever been frisked by an Arab? You don't know what you've missed.

We booked in at the hotel having been joined by another cameraman. He was an Algerian named Ahmed. The hotel was on the seafront and my eighth-floor bedroom looked out across the Red Sea. I had a bathroom, television and phone. It occurred to me that I ought to ring my wife. It had all been such a rush, I wasn't at all sure that she knew where I was.

Jeddah looked like a very nice town with plenty of large new buildings and wide streets. The petrol was so cheap that you could fill the tank of a large car for a pound. As a result, those streets were jammed with a mass of metal on wheels. They were not cheap cars, at that. There were Rolls Royces and big American cars everywhere. The Saudis seemed to drive with one hand on the wheel and the other on the horn. I think that their highway code must have had an instruction something like: 'If you can't steer your way through, blast a path with your horn.'

The next surprise was when we were joined by the rest of the Transworld crew. Including me, we had three cameramen, one Lebanese, one Algerian and one English. We were to be assisted by a Sudanese sound man, two Saudi electricians and two Arab drivers. There must be a funny story in there somewhere!

We had spent most of the day at the airport getting passes for tomorrow's filming. It was now nine o'clock and we had had no lunch, so we decided to go and eat after a quick shower and change of clothes. Our Egyptian production manager informed me that he knew a very good Egyptian restaurant in town. It sounded OK to me and the pangs of hunger were now so acute I would have eaten Japanese, Chinese, Burmese or Eskimo.

After a short drive to the edge of town, we parked the car opposite what I thought was a shop on fire. 'That's it,' said Sid, pointing in the general direction of the smoke. We managed to find our way to the entrance. The source of the smoke was a large charcoal fire cooking kebabs. Once inside, the air was clear. If a good food guide included a reference to this restaurant, it would go something like this: 'A pleasant Egyptian restaurant on the edge of town making its own smoke screen. It is approached across a very busy street, preferably

wearing some sort of breathing apparatus. Once inside, you are greeted by a rotund jovial Egyptian. After a well-cooked kebab served with rice, prawns and other delicacies you will find that a large tip will get you the meal at half-price.'

Early Sunday morning saw the unit on the way to the airport. I sat there thinking that all this double time was going to cost the production company a bomb for a crew this size. Then it suddenly dawned on me that I was the only Christian member of the unit and I was on an all-in deal which required me to work twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week if necessary.

The new airport was very impressive covering, as it did, a very large area. However, in another way, it looked insignificant, being in the middle of such a vast expanse of desert. As part of the overall film about the building of the airport, I and the rest of the motley crew were here to film the king's arrival and the dedication ceremony.

It was a very hot day with the sun shining from a clear blue sky. The temperature was well up into the nineties. There must have been 50 or more film and press cameramen there from all parts of the world and ready for the fray.

'Here we go again,' I thought, 'Back to the good old newsreel days.' It was some ten years since I had been in the punch, kick and scramble which inevitably accompanies these events. Hand-holding a film camera with a 400-foot reel of film attached, plus a twelve-volt battery round your neck, meant that it was going to be a very hot, sticky day.

Well, I did get a few kicks, but a punch or two and a few of those Arabic words I had learned during my army days in Cairo got me through. After it was all finished, the men of Transworld went back to the hotel pleased with their day's work. I had been reduced to a crumpled, hot, dusty Englishman who thought he had sun-stroke but found that he still had a twelve-volt camera battery round his neck. I went straight to bed.

It's wonderful to see what a cool shower and a rest in an air-conditioned bedroom can do for you. By evening, I was ready for a good meal, preferably at some slick restaurant. When I saw Sid coming down the stairs, I somehow guessed that we were once again heading for the 'Smoke Hole of the East'. So it was back across the smoke-filled road to renew our acquaintance with our jovial restaurateur. Sure enough, we sat down to a meal of smoked kebab on a bed of rice washed down with a bottle of Seven Up while a Saudi gent on the next table blew smoke in my face. Good old Sid, I really hoped that I got on his next film.

The plan had been to stay another four days to film various aspects

of the airport. Zacky, my travelling companion, who had now been promoted to director, arrived with the script and went off to see the airport officials to get it accepted. He returned with the news that it would be at least ten days before filming could start. It was therefore decided that the unit would go on to Mecca to work on another project. As I was a Christian, I was not allowed to go, so I returned to Riyadh.

That journey started off all right, with the usual seek and search plus a frisk or two, but it turned to disaster when I arrived at Riyadh airport. Transport was supposed to have been arranged by Transworld but there was no sign of it. I fought my way through a crowd of taxi drivers all wanting to whisk me off to destinations unknown. I had no idea of Transworld's address so there I was, still accompanied by six cases full of camera gear, a lost soul in the middle of Saudi Arabia.

I fumbled through my pockets and found a scrap of paper with the box number of Transworld plus the telephone number. There was a bewildered-looking taxi driver who had not left my side since my arrival. He kept claiming to be 'number one taxi'. He obviously thought that he had found the last of the big spenders because he had seen an airport porter con me for 50 riyals for carrying my cases about 20 yards. I showed him the numbers and, with a big smile and a nod, he loaded my six cases into the boot of his taxi.

Off we went out of the airport only to stop at the Airport Hotel some 500 yards down the road. By now I was feeling desperately in need of an English speaker who could solve my problem. Such a person materialised in the form of the hotel porter. In less than no time, he was on the phone to Transworld and another car was on the way to pick me up. What a sad day it turned out to be for my taxi driver, though. He had put in all the effort to find out where to go and now he had lost the chance to make a bob or two. I asked him how much it was for the short ride from the airport to the hotel. He said 100 riyals. Before I could pay him, my hotel porter friend came back on the scene. Taking 20 riyals out of my wallet, he sent the cabbie on his way to reflect on what might have been.

Back in the old mini-bus, we made our way to Transworld and my 'villa' which, of course, had plenty of sand but no water. Actually, it wasn't too bad a little pad. There was a small kitchen with a cooker and fridge, although I was able to get most meals at the company canteen. There was also a dining room and an air-conditioned bedroom. The air-conditioning unit made a sound like Concorde taking off. So I sat back and waited for the rest of the unit to return from Mecca in seven days' time. That would be Good Friday.

It had been three boring days sitting around the villa. It was too hot

to go out and there was no work to do. As it was Friday and there was no-one around, I thought that I would take a walk down to the canteen for lunch. The scenery consisted of continuous building sites, each with its own individual pile of rubble left behind. There were so many buildings going up, it was difficult to see any sort of planned layout. Their objective seemed to be to put up as many buildings as they could in the shortest possible time. And always there were piles of rubble left behind.

Every morning, outside my villa, there appeared four meowing cats. The two previous occupants, one English and one American cameraman, used to feed them, so I guessed that I had to take over the job. Those animals looked so thin and starving. The trouble was that I didn't know how many the four would turn into once the news of grub got around the local feline grapevine.

Talking of feeding, no-one had told me that the canteen closed on a Friday. So it was down to the supermarket for something to eat. It was small but clean, and stocked most of the necessaries from toiletries to food. A tin of this and a tin of that, and it was back to my pad to cook lunch.

The rest of the unit eventually got back from Mecca.

'Signs of another job, Mr Billy,' said Sid, the production manager. 'Tomorrow we go and film some horses.'

Now, a good director friend of mine once said, 'Communication. That's the name of the game.' Well, communication was the one thing that was not happening there.

Language is always a barrier. My twelve words of Arabic were not getting me very far but Sid could speak and understand English very well. He could also 'cock a deaf' un' when he wanted to.

'Horses?' I queried.

'Yes,' he said, 'police horses.'

And that was the end of the conversation. I would have to wait until we got to the location on the next day to find out what Mr Billy had got to film and why.

Sid had said tomorrow, but a number of tomorrows came and went. In Saudi it was always going to be tomorrow. So I just had to sit down and wait. What a way to spend Easter! Wednesday, Thursday and Friday had come and gone. Saturday turned out to be the tomorrow I had been waiting for. At six o'clock in the morning, Sid announced: 'We are off to film the horses.'

Sid had found me an assistant who could speak a little English, so off we did go to film the police horses. Transworld were making a documentary about Arab horses in various countries and I did actually film some later in Surrey. But here there was no script and no

overall plan. We just took various shots of the horses and that was it. Back to the dreary old villa to sit around and wait for the next day's filming.

Two weeks went by without a sign of work. I saw no sense in sitting around in Saudi Arabia when I could be back home working. I know that I was being paid for doing nothing but it was so boring. I asked to see the head man, Prince whatever-his-other-name-was. There was a long discussion about the reasons why I wanted to leave, most of which he obviously couldn't understand. In the end, I was paid in ten-pound-notes and given my return air ticket and a letter to say that I could leave the country. So once more my camera and I were bound for home.

Saudi Arabia had been a bit of a shock to my system. I went out there thinking that I would be working on a documentary film. Instead I had found no organisation and no plan, just a bunch of people from all parts of the world who simply did not fit together. Back home, I had hopes for better things.

11

NEW ZEALAND

As a freelance cameraman, it's up to you how far you extend your range of work. Having once worked on a feature film, some cameramen will accept nothing else. I've always thought that the camera is just the tool of the cameraman's trade. It's up to him what he produces with it, whether it be newsreel, documentary, television, or features. It is a matter of adjusting to each situation. They are all different but in the end you are judged by what comes out of the camera. I'll always remember what my editor at Pathé once said to me: 'I don't want any excuses or reasons why. I'll judge your work by what I see on the screen.' I suppose that having been a cameraman for all those reasons – newsreel, documentary, television, features and combat during the war – I had an advantage over most. I've had satisfaction out of all of those aspects of my career. We won't mention Saudi Arabia.

Anyway, having got the latter out of my system, I was back home again, around and about, calling on various production companies letting them know that I was free. Another important thing in the film business is that you've got to keep in touch, and a personal visit is much better than a phone call.

In this case it just so happened that when I called on my friend Michael Forlong, of Michael Forlong Productions, the timing was just right. He was setting up a children's film to be shot in New Zealand. So, with no more ado, I offered my services as cameraman and, with the fine detail agreed, I had my next film and a trip to New Zealand.

It was a small unit that left from England. The rest of the crew and actors would be from New Zealand and Australia. There was just Michael Forlong as director, myself as cameraman, Bob Jordan as operator and two sound recordists. We left London bound for Singapore, then went on to Wellington, New Zealand.

With the addition of two camera assistants, two actors and three children from New Zealand, and a continuity girl from Australia, we were complete as a unit. Now, Michael Forlong, being a New Zealander himself, and his having hired a rather nice BMW, took us

to his home town of Wanganui. We were a few miles short of our destination when the BMW broke down and we had to call out a breakdown truck. The car was loaded on to it and, still with the five of us aboard, we were driven into Wanganui. Not quite the homecoming that had been planned for its prodigal son!

The storyline took us to both the North and South Islands. We filmed at the hot springs and at Rotarua with the Maoris. Then it was on to Wellington and the Picton ferry over the Marlborough Sound. That was a beautiful spot just made for scenic photography, where we spent two weeks. With all those places and many more beautiful locations, New Zealand has so much to offer. The North and South Islands together are about the same size as the UK but with less than half the population of London alone. There was no rushing or dashing about, just a nice easy pace of living. If ever I leave these shores, New Zealand is the place I'll go.

Before coming home, I spent a few days in Sydney working on a couple of television commercials, but when I went to leave, I found that my air ticket only took me as far as Singapore. The rest of the journey from Singapore to the UK would have been by Caledonian Airways and the ticket for that part of my trip home was waiting for me at Singapore. I had no documentary proof of this arrangement and, with my very long hair I was going to get sent back to Sydney at the expense of Qantas Airways if the ticket wasn't there. Emigrate to

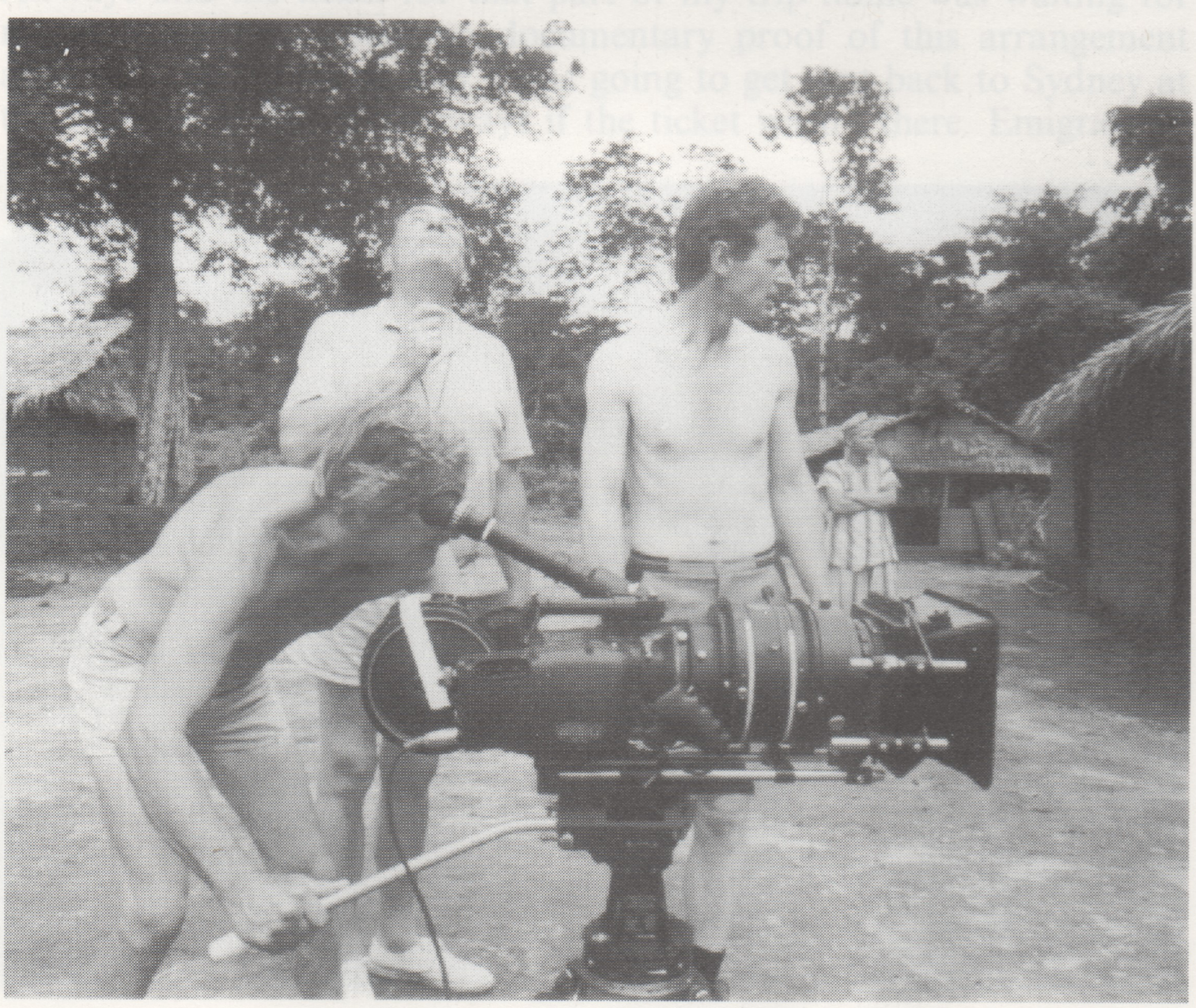
Australia? No way! I got in touch with Michael Forlong back in Wanganui and he raised the money for a ticket from Sydney to London. So from now on it's short back and sides when going to Singapore without a ticket home!

12

NIGERIA

After the pleasant land of New Zealand, I travelled to a not-so-pleasant land, Nigeria. The job was to work on a film for a company near Lagos run by a Nigerian chief named Hubert Ogunde. He had set up a production company at a village called Osso some 30 miles from Lagos. He had built a compound just outside the village with two bungalows to house his English technicians and a very nice house for himself. But surrounding the whole thing was a high wall patrolled by two armed guards. That's Nigeria.

His film equipment was the very best. He had a German Arriflex



35BL with all the extras you would find in feature-film-making. In fact it was as good a set-up as you would find in England. He hired his crew through his agent in London. There was a director, assistant director, cameraman and assistant cameraman, a sound recordist and a special effects man. And there were plenty of those in his films.

I went out there to work on two films, both traditional Nigerian folklore stories for showing in Nigeria. The accommodation was very good. Each bungalow had two bedrooms and a bathroom with air-conditioning, and one had a dining room and a rest room. One of the chief's six wives did the cooking. That wasn't so good.

My first trip out there was for four weeks. With 50% of your pay up-front and a return air ticket, you were off to a good start. It was always a drama getting in and out of the country. There was so much corruption that only money talked. Even getting past the customs when you did have the right passport and visa required a little money aimed in the right direction to help you on your way.

Once past customs, and having greased a few palms, we were driven to the village and our home for the next four weeks. It was a pleasant setting inside the walls, a green oasis with fruit and green lawns. Outside, what was called a village was just a collection of shacks and tumble-down buildings. How the other half live. No wonder we were advised not to go out at night.

The chief had built a mud village as his film set. It was about three miles from his compound and consisted of some ten or so houses, with a market place plus a building where the unit could eat and relax.

The storyline of one of his films was about a Nigerian king who had three old wives who were all barren and couldn't produce a son and heir. So he took a fourth young wife. When she gave birth to a son, the three old wives threw the child into the lake and put a stone in its place. As a result, the King banished the young wife to the wilderness.

Some years later, a young boy appeared out of the lake, walking on the water. He found his mother and both returned to the king.

Having read the script back in London, before the unit left, we had decided to try to get some underwater shots of the baby. For that purpose we had taken out with us an underwater housing for the camera and a model of a small baby.

While we were there, the chief had a tank built under our instruction. It was some 15 feet square and five feet deep, and it was large enough to be used again on other films. It was quite an operation. The story was that, as the baby is thrown into the lake, a mysterious force draws him into a cave to survive to grow into a small boy. So our special effects man had to build an entrance to a cave inside the tank for that shot.

Now, just picture all this work being done in the middle of nowhere by Nigerians who didn't know why or for what it is being done. Come the day for filming, the tank was filled with water. Not fresh water but river water. Can you imagine what river water is like in Nigeria? Visibility was about two feet under water. With the view-finder at the top of the camera, I didn't have to put my head under the water. The only shot I got was the baby going into the cave two feet away.

It was a shame after all the effort on the part of everyone concerned. It was another case of lack of communication. No-one told our friends to fill the tank with fresh water. As soon as the filming was over, I was

straight back to my bungalow for a quick shower. No telling what was in that water.

We had a large generator to supply power for my lamps for the interior shots. As it was rather noisy, it was parked some distance away with the current being carried to the set by heavy cable. One

day, while filming, the fuse blew every time I put on an extra lamp. When I went outside to check the cable, I found that it had been replaced by a series of thin cables joined together by 13-amp plugs which were totally inadequate to take the load. Turning to the Nigerian electrician, I asked him where the heavy cable was. 'I've sold it, Mr Billy,' was the reply. Apparently another film unit was working in Lagos so he had sold it to them. He thought that the thin cable would be all right because we were working on a small set and were only using small lamps. Yes, they were all at it. Corruption was the name of the game.

The official language in Nigeria was English, but the films were shot in Yoruba which was one of the many tribal languages. The poor sound man hadn't a clue what he was recording and had to leave it up to the chief to OK the dialogue.

It was six Englishmen against the rest, but what the Nigerians lacked in knowledge of film-making, they made up for with enthusiasm. We had the best equipment and they were great films to work on. We pushed our luck all the way on some of the effects shots though.

Processing and editing was done back in England. The finished film was then sent back to be shown in the small town and villages on a mobile projector operated by one of the chief's wives. Lagos and other big towns had their own cinemas.

13

THE FALKLANDS

I went out to the Falklands after the war was over. The Central Office of Information was making a documentary film on the building of the new airfield and military base. It was a small unit of four and the camera assistant was my son, following in his father's footsteps. We flew from Brize Norton to Ascension Island in an RAF VC10. The rest of the journey had to be by Hercules transport plane to the Falklands, because the runway at Port Stanley wasn't big enough for the VC10. Now, I've flown in a lot of different aircraft in my career but this was a new one on me. It was loaded with supplies which took up the whole centre of the aircraft. Canvas seats hung along each side of the fuselage. But the *pièce de resistance* was at the rear. There was an Elsan toilet for all to see and use. What was it that my union rules

said about entitlement to first class travel? Well, I suppose that there have to be exceptions. This was certainly one of them.

The Falklands were a great disappointment. It was a bleak tree-less moorland exposed to punishing sub-Antarctic weather and with a population of only about 2,000. Half of those were engaged in rearing sheep for the wool, so there were a lot more sheep than people.

The building of the airport and military base was a dirty, muddy job and was going on in very cold weather. We were equipped with warm clothing and I even had my fur hat from my Arctic trip.

It was not one of my favourite films. A dull, uninteresting country with a lot of heavy vehicles making it look even worse. Still, it had been another location and another film.

14

SOUTH AFRICA

After the Falklands, I was keeping my ear to the ground and making my calls as usual, but things had gone a little quiet. I was looking for a nice location in the sun to warm me up again. Then some news came from close to home. A friend of my son's was about to direct a film in South Africa with locations in Rome and England. Part of the deal with South Africa was that he had to use a South African cameraman, so when I approached him, all he could offer me was a job as operator on the film. It was good money and a nice location, so how could I refuse? With a further six films to follow, I could be on a good run.

The first location was to be Redhill General Hospital in Surrey. As that just happened to be literally a short walk down the road from my house, you couldn't get much closer to home. Our South African cameraman didn't think that it was worth his while to travel all that way just for a week's filming, so I took over the job.

If my slogan was 'Have camera will travel' I should perhaps have added 'And distance no object'. After Redhill, it was on to Rome.

The South African cameraman was Volker Miros. We met for the first time in Rome and we got on very well together. He was a large rotund man and reminded me of Orson Welles. He was a little embarrassed when he heard my track record and wondered why I was only operating and not the cameraman. But we co-operated together, exchanged ideas and it worked very well.

The filming in Rome and England was to establish where the story was supposed to be taking place. The bulk of the film was interiors and these were to be shot in South Africa. So after a week in Rome, it was on to Cape Town, South Africa.

There were only three of us from England on the film. The rest of the unit were South Africans. We had a flat on the seafront and took our meals at a nearby hotel, so this looked like being a nice location. The studio was a converted factory where we shot all the interiors. What exteriors we did there had nothing in shot which would distin-

guish them from England. This was no blockbuster movie, more a television feature.

Why did they go to all the trouble of setting all this up in South Africa? It was all because of the restrictions on exporting South African money at the time, I was to find out later.

Before leaving South Africa, I spent a few days on Volker's ranch and game reserve. It covered hundreds of acres of beautiful country with many wild animals. It was a very relaxing time seeing the best of that country, but after all too short a stay, it was back to Cape Town.

Things were very different there. *Apartheid* was still in force with segregated beaches and shanty towns. Some people lived in luxury while others nearby lived in absolute squalor. I couldn't help thinking that maybe one day we would all learn to share the good things in life and live as one.

I was called to the production office to collect my pay the day that I left South Africa. I expected a cheque. Instead I was handed a rather large envelope containing 40,000 Rand all in notes. I asked the reason why, and was told that, as the film was being made with South African money, that was what I was being paid in. I knew that there was a regulation about how much money you could take out of the country. I had a vague idea that the limit was about 50 Rand. It certainly wasn't 40,000, that I knew.

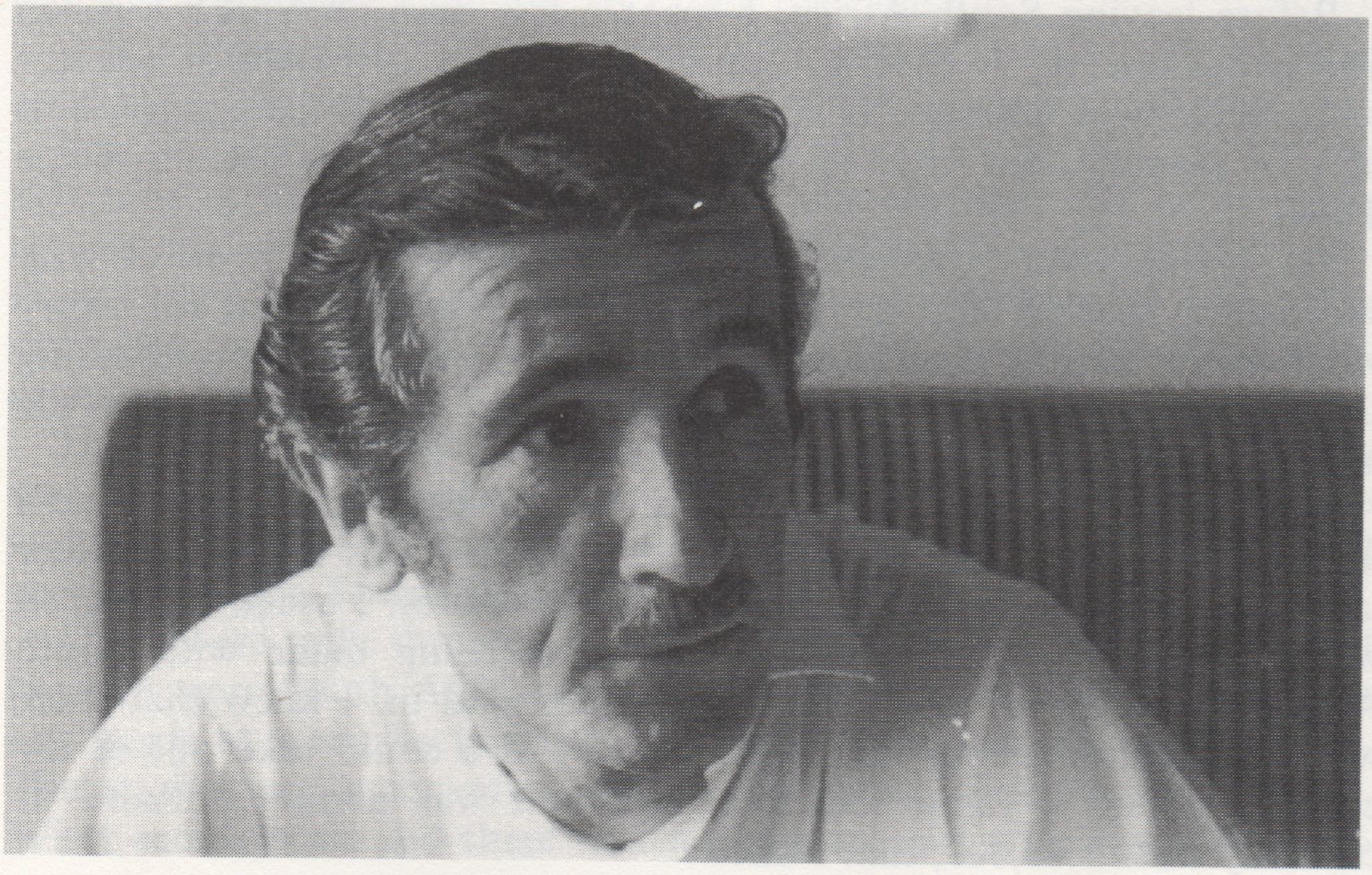
So once again I found myself in one of those take-it-or-leave-it situations and I felt that I had been dropped right in it. There was only one thing for it. I put all the money in my suitcase and it went through with the rest of the baggage. Imagine my relief when I got home and unpacked that case to find all the money was still there.

When I coolly handed in the money at my bank, the cashier was, to say the least, rather taken aback by the amount. With mumbled words to the effect that he would have to make a phone call, off he went. He came back to tell me that it was perfectly all right and that the money would be paid into my account. So maybe I didn't do a naughty thing after all. For some reason unknown to me, none of the other six films that had been mentioned originally were made in South Africa. So I went back to walking the streets of Soho looking for work.

But South Africa was to be my last film.

Now, after 60 years in the film industry, I've sold my camera and hung up my tripod. Modern technology has left me behind. I still think that there is a future for film and that it will be around for years to come. Cinema newsreels have long since gone, largely because no-one put up a fight to save them. Feature films are still made in that very expensive way, but there aren't too many cinemas now where they can be shown. So video copies and television screenings have to make up for the loss.

I still travel. But all I take with me now is a Box Brownie.



LIST OF CREDITS

Feature Films & TV Series

'Stop Over Forever'	Associated British Pathé
'Death is a Woman'	Associated British Pathé
'Hand of Night'	Associated British Pathé
'The Flood'	Children's Film Foundation
'Davy Jones Locker'	Children's Film Foundation
'Avalanche'	Children's Film Foundation
'High Rise Donkey'	Children's Film Foundation
'Hijack'	Children's Film Foundation
'Hi Teke' [New Zealand]	Children's Film Foundation
'Tempo'	ABC Television Productions
'Journey of a Lifetime'	ABC Television Productions
'In Search of St Paul'	ABC Television Productions
'Britain Today'	BBC Television Productions
'Bid for Power'	BBC Television Productions
'Mission Critical'	BBC Television Productions
'Follow Through'	BBC Television Productions
'Conundrum'	BBC Television Productions
'Aropin N' Tenia'	Ogunde Enterprises Nigeria
'Ayammo'	Ogunde Enterprises Nigeria

A chance opportunity to work as a camera assistant at Pinewood Studios in the thirties marked the beginning of a varied and exciting career for Billy Jordan, who charts the ups and downs of his life as a cameraman for us here. The interruption of World War II provided him with the opportunity to turn adversity to advantage, and he became one of the first army cameramen working for the Army Film Unit, serving all over North Africa and the Near East. A return spell at Pinewood as an instructor in battle photography was followed by a ground breaking period working for Pathé News, chasing news stories and creating newsreels for cinema, before graduating to feature film-making and documentary work. Jordan subsequently became a freelance cameraman, and travelled the world making movies, including spells in the West Indies, South Africa, Nigeria, New Zealand and the Arctic. Jordan is now retired and lives in Spain.

Cover: Richard B. Crotch

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